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Earl Warren Oral History Project

A. Wayne Amerson

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA AND ITS CHALLENGES
TO A NEGRO IN THE MID-1900s

With An Introduction by
Henry G. Ziesenhenné

An Interview Conducted by
Joyce Henderson



A. Wayne Amerson
May 1974

TABLE OF CONTENTS - A. Wayne Amerson

PREFACE	i
AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION by Henry G. Ziesenhenn	vi
INTERVIEW HISTORY	xiii
 I EARLY YEARS	 1
II THE CALIFORNIA STATE RELIEF ADMINISTRATION	17
III THE CALIFORNIA STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE	24
IV CALIFORNIA WAR MANPOWER COMMISSION	27
V SUPERVISOR OF PLACEMENT	53
<u>William Byron Rumford</u>	61
VI HOUSING	68
<u>Housing in the Bay Area</u>	68
<u>The Berkeley Housing Ordinance, 1963</u>	76
<u>The California Fair Housing Bill, 1963</u>	79
VII THE CALIFORNIA DEMOCRATIC COUNCIL - CDC	82
VIII INVOLVEMENT IN THE FUNERAL SOCIETY MOVEMENT	85
IX ATTITUDES ON NEGROES AND RACE	88
APPENDIX	94
<u>International Association of Public Employees</u>	94
<u>Letter from Reverend John Dillingham</u>	95
<u>Obituary, John Dillingham</u>	98
INDEX	100

PREFACE

The Earl Warren Oral History Project, a five-year project of the Regional Oral History Office, was inaugurated in 1969 to produce tape-recorded interviews with persons prominent in the arenas of politics, governmental administration, and criminal justice during the Warren Era in California. Focusing on the years 1925-1953, the interviews were designed not only to document the life of Chief Justice Warren but to gain new information on the social and political changes of a state in the throes of a depression, then a war, then a postwar boom.

An effort was made to document the most significant events and trends by interviews with key participants who spoke from diverse vantage points. Most were queried on the one or two topics in which they were primarily involved; a few interviewees with special continuity and breadth of experience were asked to discuss a multiplicity of subjects. While the cut-off date of the period studied was October, 1953--Earl Warren's departure for the United States Supreme Court--there was no attempt to end an interview perfunctorily when the narrator's account had to go beyond that date in order to complete the topic.

The interviews have stimulated the deposit of Warreniana in the form of papers from friends, aides, and the opposition; government documents; old movie newsreels; video tapes; and photographs. This Earl Warren collection is being added to The Bancroft Library's extensive holdings on twentieth century California politics and history.

The project has been financed by four outright grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by gifts from local donors which were matched by the Endowment. Contributors include the former law clerks of Chief Justice Earl Warren, the Cortez Society, many long-time supporters of "the Chief," and friends and colleagues of some of the major memoirists in the project. The Roscoe and Margaret Oakes Foundation and the San Francisco Foundation have jointly sponsored the Northern California Negro Political History Series, a unit of the Earl Warren Project.

Particular thanks are due the Friends of The Bancroft Library, who were instrumental in raising local funds for matching, who served as custodian for all such funds, and who then supplemented from their own treasury all local contributions on a one-dollar-for-every-three dollars basis.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in the history of California and the West. The Office is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, Director of The Bancroft Library.

Amelia R. Fry, Director
Earl Warren Oral History Project

Willa K. Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

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EARL WARREN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

(California, 1926-1953)

Interviews Completed by June, 1974

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A. Wayne Amerson, Northern California and Its Challenge to a Negro in the Mid-1900's. 1974 With an introduction by Henry Ziesenhenn

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Richard Allen McGee, Participant in the Evolution of American Corrections: 1931-1973. 1974

Donald McLaughlin, Careers in Mining Geology and Management, University Governance and Teaching. 1974

Tarea Pittman, NAACP Official and Civil Rights Worker. 1974
With an introduction by C.L. Dellums

Robert B. Powers, Law Enforcement, Race Relations: 1930-60. 1971

William Byron Rumford, Legislator for Fair Employment, Fair Housing, and Public Health. 1973
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Merrell F. Small, The Office of the Governor Under Earl Warren. 1972

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With an introduction by Lawrence I. Hewes, Fellow, Center for the
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George Killion, Observations on Culbert Olson, Earl Warren, and Money
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A. Alan Post, Watchdog on State Spending.

Paul Leake, Statement on the Board of Equalization.

Earl Warren's Bakersfield. 1971

Maryann Ashe and Ruth Smith Henley, Earl Warren's Bakersfield.

Omar Cavins, Coming of Age in Bakersfield.

Francis Vaughan, School Days in Bakersfield.

Ralph Kreiser, A Reporter Recollects the Warren Case.

Manford Martin and Ernest McMillan, On Methias Warren.

Earl Warren and Health Insurance: 1943-1949. 1971

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Byrl R. Salsman, Shepherding Health Insurance Bills Through the
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John W. Cline, M.D., California Medical Association Crusade Against
Compulsory State Health Insurance.

Earl Warren and the State Department of Mental Hygiene. 1973

Frank F. Tallman, M.D., Dynamics of Change in State Mental Institutions.

Portia Bell Hume, M.D., Mother of Community Mental Health Services.

Earl Warren and the State Department of Public Health. 1973

With an introduction by E.S. Rogers, M.D., Dean, UC School of Public
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Malcolm H. Merrill, M.D., M.P.H., A Director Reminisces.

Frank M. Stead, Environmental Pollution Control.

Henry Ongerth, Recollections of the Bureau of Sanitary Engineering.

Kent A. Zimmerman, M.D., Mental Health Concepts.

Lawrence Arnstein, Public Health Advocates and Issues.

The Governor and the Public, the Press, and the Legislature. 1973
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Verne Scoggins, Observations on California Affairs by Governor Earl Warren's Press Secretary.

Beach Vasey, Governor Warren and the Legislature.

The Japanese-American Relocation Reviewed. 1974

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Dillon S. Myer, War Relocation Authority: The Director's Account.

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Hisako Hibi, paintings of Tanforan and Topaz camps.

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Clarence Severin, Chief Clerk in the Alameda County District Attorney's Office.

Homer R. Spence, Attorney, Legislator, and Judge.

E.A. Daly, Alameda County Political Leader and Journalist.

John Bruce, A Reporter Remembers Earl Warren.

Volume III

J. Frank Coakley, A Career in the Alameda County District Attorney's Office.

Albert E. Hederman, Jr., From Office Boy to Assistant District Attorney.

Lowell Jensen, Reflections of the Alameda County District Attorney.

James H. Oakley, Early Life of a Warren Assistant.

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This series of interviews was granted and recorded

As acknowledgement to

My Many Friends;

whose kindnesses over the years of my life, made it possible that I could be helpful to others.

--to my good and kind friend, Miss Bernice G. Cofer, former Race Relations Consultant for the Northern California-Nevada Baptist Convention, whose supplying of historical data greatly aided the continuity of much of the information related to my activities with the Baptist denomination and also many of the organizational movements involved in the hectic scramble for solutions to the inter-group problem areas developing after World War II.

--to my friend, Rev. John Dillingham, whom I affectionately remember as "John D," for his supplying of information regarding the Faith Presbyterian Church and Center. "John D" died February 23, 1974; however, we are filing with the University of California, his accounting of some of the involvements in the launching of the project. His training and experience which ultimately resulted in the assignment may be reviewed in the 1950 edition of "Who's Who in Colored America."

--these pages doubtlessly would not have been printed except for the concern, the vision and integrity of the following three persons. I am yet pleased to list as friends. Mrs. Lemphi Hayes, then Social Service Supervisor, and Mr. Glenn M. Stout, then Solano-Contra Costa Counties District Manager, both of the State Relief Administration, who hired me as the first Negro employee in that state agency in California. It was later that my tenure in the Department of Employment was influenced by many hours of assistance and guidance from my friend, Daniel N. Longaker; who quickly discerned I was not to receive the training usually given new employees, and personally aided my bridging that administrative deficiency.

--to Elgo Sabatini, former personnel manager of General Metals Corporation and now vice-president of a casualty insurance company, who over the years has been a source of encouragement and counsel. For years, many years, his advice and his parting

words, "You ought to try it, Wayne, it just might work. Let me know how you come out," made the difference between failure and success.

--to my friend, Henry Ziesenhenné, for permitting me to manoeuvre him into the writing of the Introduction. Henry, aside from being a good and true friend; too, has paid a price: A price for his forthright attitudes regarding race relations. I personally am convinced that his slow promotional progress in the Department of Employment can be attributed to his open and frank approach to race relations when the Department was under Federal administration and he was employed as the representative of the Presidential Fair Employment Practices Commission.

and dedicated to

My Parents;

whose dedication to a commitment, made these pages possible.

Sincerely,

A. Wayne Amerson

INTRODUCTION

It was just another of those days in early nineteen hundred seventy-three when the telephone rang, and it was Wayne Amerson with an unusual kind of request for him. Oftimes when he called, he would inquire about the labor market, civil service announcements, and job openings; doubtlessly for aiding of some acquaintance or friend who wanted a job; but this day was different. Instead, he asked if I had a copy of the Charles S. Johnson study, of minority employment in the San Francisco Bay Area of about 1943; in which Dr. Johnson concluded with concern about the potential mass minority unemployment problem at the end of World War II. Wayne explained that he needed this background information to use in an introduction he was preparing, to the life of former Assemblyman W. Byron Rumford, for the University of California.

Though I thought I had a copy of the survey, I could not locate it; but I did find and provide him with some information on the Bay Area population and employment picture during the War, and the community changes caused by the recruitment of war workers from the South. "This is the greatest migration of people in history," was the description used by Sam Kagel, then Northern California War Manpower Commission Director. Mr. Kagel had appointed me as Minority Group Representative for the United States Employment Service, the liaison officer between the War Manpower Commission and the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices; hence some of the information wanted was included in files and files of reference material I saved from those days; but, "What happened to my copy of the Dr. Charles S. Johnson study?" At least, I was glad I could be of some help to Wayne.

Some several months later, Wayne again telephoned and stopped by my house. He said he had been interviewed for the story of his life; and wanted me to read the questions asked, and his replies. I learned much about him which I had not known before: His teaching assignments in the South; his appointment to the State Relief Administration following the denial of the directorship of an educational training project in Vallejo, a project which he had prepared and presented, and which had been tentatively approved. I learned of his activities in religious organizations, and his involvements in the many community organizations. When he finished reading the interview material, he asked me if I would write the introduction to the series of interviews which in fact was his autobiography, and I told him, "Yes." After he left, my wife (Lucille), in a very serious mood, asked, "Henry how could you? You haven't written a thing like that in all your life. Have you lost your mind?" "Well," he told me. "You know Henry, I had never written anything like it either, but if you need any help--I'll try to help as much as I can. It'll just be two people who don't

know what they're doing, so, we'll just make twice as big a mess of it. What could I say to that, and furthermore I'm sort of pleased he asked me, and that I would have the opportunity to help give him some of the recognition he deserves," I told my wife. (The task is finished, and this space was left, for I was sure I could add; that my good and considerate wife--who stood in utter amazement when I agreed to try to do the job--edited and re-edited my efforts, making many helpful suggestions and needed corrections before I had finished; and finally did much of the typing. She is a friend of Wayne too, as is also my son, John.)

I think it is here I should state, the barriers to Negroes in employment, housing, community affairs and religious activities, are considerably less today than they were two decades ago, because of an A. Wayne Amerson and other dedicated Negro men and women like him. These were persons of principle, who resisted racial discrimination against themselves and others, and worked for legislation to provide for all people to exercise their constitutional rights. They worked for years, indeed decades, to obtain equal opportunity to participate in the activities of the nation's society; and the struggle seems to go endlessly on. In the mid- nineteen-fifties there were no state or federal laws which provided for the specific enforcement of the constitutional rights of Negroes and other minority peoples. Nineteen fifty-nine saw the passage of the State Unruh Civil Rights Act; and the California State Fair Employment Practices Bill which also provided for an administering commission. Comparatively soon thereafter, 1963, the Legislature passed the California Fair Housing law, and it was in this climate the Federal government enacted numerous civil rights laws during the nineteen-sixties. As I have considered this assignment, I often have thought as to how Wayne's future may have developed if he had been free to follow his destiny without his continuing, daily struggle against prejudice and discrimination against himself and his people.

It was in July of 1947 I first met Wayne Amerson. We both had been assigned to the Richmond, California office of the State Employment Service, he as a placement supervisor, and I as a placement interviewer. Those job assignments were the result of a series of examinations, announced and held by the State Civil Service Board in 1947; and required as validating, and in instance promotional examinations, for employees who had been working in the state system prior to January 1, 1942. This was the date when the Federal government through the United States Employment Service by Presidential Executive Order, considered it necessary and did acquire the operations of all state employment services throughout the United States, in order to control the supply of manpower needs for the war effort. Wayne, though technically eligible, had been permitted to take the series on a promotional basis; and I am using the word 'permitted'

with full understanding of its meaning and with knowledgeable intent. Through no fault of his own, a yet unexplained delay in the signing of his authorization of hire in 1941; was signed, approximately two months after he had been working. Two appearances before the State Personnel Board, and finally on his advisement to the same Board of his intentions and activities to place a court injunction against the entire state-wide examination process on the day before the scheduled examinations, moved the Board to grant him 'permission.' In spite of the weeks, in fact months of confusion over his right to take the examinations Mr. Amerson took and passed the examinations for four promotional levels, but was only appointed to the lowest of the supervisory level. Considering his experience, education, and abilities; many of his friends and co-workers have said, there was no rational reason why he should not have been appointed to the second level, and I agree. There is a factor that should be remembered: Wayne was the first Negro employed in a professional status by the State Department of Employment, and later became the first Negro Supervisor in that same department, throughout the state of California.

I, not having worked for the State Employment Service prior to the War, could not take the examination series on a promotional basis, and since the promotional supervisory examination lists provided enough personnel to fill all such positions, I was assigned as an interviewer off the validating examination list. From this situation, I too had some interesting experiences, because under the Federal government's operation of the Employment Service I had been working in a job classification which did not exist in the state system, and it was ten years later before the State Personnel Board on the request of the Department of Employment, authorized such a position, a Minority Group Representative. Years of requests by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and many other groups, as well as individuals; and yet no action, until ten years later. In a confused effort to locate me from a job classification that no longer did exist, I was first sent to Sacramento where I worked in the Employer-Union Relations Unit, of the Technical Services Section; but finally, I arrived as a state employee off the interviewer list in the Richmond office.

Prior to his promotion to the Richmond office and during World War II; Mr. Amerson, working in the Oakland office of the Employment Service, was assigned to what was to be one of the, if not the, most difficult and responsible jobs in the area. He and a staff of twenty-two to twenty-six professional employees plus many clerks and typists, processed in excess of one hundred - twenty - thousand occupational questionnaires; classifying workers occupationally for war work, recommending deferment to draft boards, referring workers to war industry, and supervising the staff relationships with the many war industry job recruiters stationed in the Oakland office. He maintained good relationships with the unions involved

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in the war industries, so much so that one of the executives of the Boilermakers Union in Richmond today, is a Negro. The first person he referred and was hired on the job was hired as a dispatcher, a Mr. Ben Watkins. Later he referred a Mr. Roles who was hired and diligently worked to up-grade the position; and the gentleman now employed, a Mr. King, was later hired and has developed himself and the position into one of considerable community respect and goodwill, the secretary-treasurer. There were countless Negro persons placed in positions which later became their life's work, through Wayne's efforts during and after the War.

It also was during the War, the War Manpower Training Center in San Francisco needed an instructor in the use of the 'Dictionary of Occupational Titles,' and who else but Wayne. He and one other co-worker taught all the newly hired Employment Service employees in the area; they being called in for such training, on schedule, soon after being hired. He also taught classes related to application taking and the interviewing process, and finally after the War was over there was a need to classify former war workers, discharged veterans, and youth; all, with no or limited occupational experience or skills; into meaningful entry classifications. The Federal government had developed such a classifying section of the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, which was known as Part IV. The idea was good, the dictionary proved to be quite useable, but the instructions for its use were of little or no value. Who helped good ole' Uncle Sam? Wayne Amerson and his co-training officer re-organized and re-wrote the training manual, and then gave the training to all the Employment Service interviewers in the area.

As if all his Employment Service activities were not enough I later learned that Wayne, this friend of mine, was 'moonlighting.' He had a part-time job in private industry. He was working as a minority personnel consultant for one of the largest foundry operations in Alameda County. There, as elsewhere, he was involved in the usual confrontations with supervision, worker uneasiness, and years and years of traditional customs of inequalities. As I recall, he seemed quite satisfied with his performance on that job, for as he occasionally refers to it, he apparently enjoyed the full and sincere cooperation of management; hence, many problems were solved, many capable employees were recruited who continued to be employed long after the War ended, and the first Negro foundry apprentice in Oakland was enrolled as **a result of his efforts.**

In the Richmond Employment Service office, Mr. Amerson was a good supervisor. He knew the objectives to be accomplished by the agency, the policies and procedures to be used, and he communicated well with the employees he supervised. He learned what abilities his employees possessed, he trained them to perform their jobs correctly, and he showed his concern about the employees' personal welfare. He neither permitted

harrassment of his workers by other supervisors, nor permitted the local office manager to interfere with the employees he supervised. Although none of his staff had been supervised by a Negro or even had worked with a Negro, as a matter of fact; the staff members of the entire office respected him as a supervisor. There were several Caucasian women employees who were from the Deep South and who did not readily accept instructions from a Negro at first, but in time they learned to appreciate his abilities and admire him as a friend. Mr. Amerson was concerned about the unemployed, and he introduced a messenger service for the job applicants. Those applicants who were unable to leave a telephone number where they could be contacted were called upon in person by an interviewer who gave them job referral instructions. He frequently asked me to drive my car to a job applicant's residence in the war housing apartments in Richmond and to homes in North Richmond, San Pablo, El Sobrante, and El Cerrito.

Mr. Amerson was an active member in the two employee organizations which most of the employees had joined: one, an organization to promote professionalism in the work of employment security, and the other, an organization to protect our civil service rights. When a local chapter of one of the organizations became almost inactive due to a lack of attendance at meetings and a decline in membership, Mr. Amerson helped in getting members to turn out for meetings and in recruiting new members.

Mr. Amerson did not talk much about his after-work activities, for he usually was too busy working. I do not recall that he ever took regular coffee breaks which employees are permitted to take in the morning and afternoon. I think he usually used that time to plan for some outside activity, perhaps for that same evening. We mostly heard Mr. Amerson talk a lot about automobiles; one that he had heard about, one that he wanted to see, or the new car which he had just purchased! When he did get a new car, it was due to the mileage that his speedometer had recorded. His activities in the church, with minority groups, and with his friends regarding their never ending struggle for civil rights enactments required a considerable amount of travel. A large part of his travel, however, was to visit his parents in Vallejo whose health and welfare was a major concern.

After working about five years in Richmond, Wayne left when one of the budget cuts removed one supervisory position from the local office, and he chose to transfer in order to permit a friend who had always worked in the Richmond office to remain there.

His transfer resulted in him going to the San Francisco Professional, Commercial, Clerical and Sales office which was then located in the Ferry Building. He worked there for several years, selling his home in Oakland and buying a co-op apartment unit in San Francisco. Who ever heard of buying a unit in a co-op apartment in those days? Well Wayne did. He

*See Appendix, p. 94, for International Association of Public Employees, 1950.

was now able to spend more time on his activities with the Board of the interracial Fellowship Church. He invited my wife and me to attend the Sunday Morning Services, and we had several opportunities to hear Dr. Howard Thurman's sermons. On one occasion Wayne invited us to dinner at his apartment, and we met his brother Henry and his family. At the time Henry had become an employee of the California State Department of Corrections (at present I understand he is a supervisor of one of the units of the agency). Later, we also were to meet Mr. Amerson's youngest brother, Ralph, then a student at the University of Chicago, who worked during the summer in the Bay Area. He also worked for sometime in the Oakland Professional, Clerical, and Sales office where my wife was also employed (Ralph is now an attorney for the State of California and lives in Sacramento).

About 1955, Mr. Amerson transferred from the San Francisco office to the Oakland Industrial and Services office where again the job of a Supervisor became most difficult. The policy of the Department, a process whereby the Supervisors were regularly rotated throughout all the supervisory positions, not only in the Employment Service but in the Unemployment Insurance Program as well was instituted. Great numbers of people were served, and the lobbies were continually crowded with people. Several unhappy incidents occurred and Mr. Amerson requested and successfully encouraged the state to station one or more policemen there to keep the peace and quiet.

Mr. Amerson retired from State Employment in 1960. He had not been promoted after 1947. Although he had passed all the examinations which were given about every three years, he did not pass them high enough to compete against the veteran points. Too, it could have been the oral examinations given by the qualifications appraisal board which was composed of representatives of the State Personnel Board, the Department of Employment, and a member of the public at large. I remember him returning from one of those oral interviews, stating that he had told the Qualifications Appraisal Board that he would like to be promoted to a Local Office Manager; a statement which startled the board members. He retired before his opportunity to become a Local Office Manager was possible. In the mid-1960's, Negroes and Spanish-speaking employees in the Department of Employment were to be promoted to Local Office Managers, Consultants, and Administrators. The good job performance of Mr. Amerson as a supervisory employee of the Department, and his after work activities with minority groups contributed largely to the promotions which minority groups later were to attain.

After he had retired from State Employment, Wayne now had the opportunity to devote more time to his career of service to his fellowman. While a member of the Berkeley Co-op, one day he was asked if he would be willing to serve on the Board of the Bay Area Funeral Society. He said yes,

and he is yet a member of the board, some twelve years later. This society grew and other organizations were established in California, and a California State Funeral Association was established. Wayne has been its president and now is a board member. A National Funeral Association was established, and where is Mr. Amerson? Yes, a national board member. Due to his experience in personnel and manpower work, he was asked to serve on the City of Berkeley's Personnel Board. Illness and night meetings terminated this after seven years. Mr. Amerson believed in the need for a strong Democratic Party, and so he spent nine years as Office Manager of the Democratic Headquarters of Alameda County. He has found time to speak to classes of students. He has been an active worker for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and he continues to serve and to recruit new members.

Early in 1969 Mr. Amerson's activities were stopped briefly due to a heart attack he suffered which required hospitalization for awhile. By summer of 1972 he was quite active again as we received postcards from Washington, D.C. and New York City where he stated he was attending a national board meeting and later the Annual Conference of Christians and Jews.

In conclusion, I wish to quote from an article in the San Francisco Chronicle of December 9, 1973, "An Expert on Christmas' Meaning," which was an interview with Dr. Howard Thurman. "What 'The Mood of Christmas' really says, according to its author, who went through some thirty-five years of his writings for its selections, 'is that the test of life is often found in the amount of pain one can absorb without spoiling his joy!'"

Using this criterion, Wayne Amerson has passed "the test of life," with highest honors.

Henry G. Ziesenhenné

March 1974
Richmond, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

A. Wayne Amerson was interviewed as a part of the Earl Warren Oral History Project and its sub-series, Northern California Negro Political Leaders, in order to preserve his memoirs as the first Negro to be employed by the California State Employment Service. His interview also shows the views, ambitions, and personality of someone who belonged to one of the early Negro families to settle in California before World War I. His papers are housed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

Interviewer: Joyce Henderson, Negro history specialist for the Earl Warren Oral History Project.

Conduct of the Interview: The interview sessions took place on September 13, 15, and 19, of 1972. All were taped in what was for nine years the Democratic Party headquarters at 2760 73rd Avenue in Oakland, which was closed in February of 1973. Mr. Amerson manned the office daily on a part-time basis, and it served as a convenient place for the interview. He lives as a confirmed bachelor in Vallejo, California.

Editing: The interview was lightly edited by Joyce Henderson and sent to Mr. Amerson for a closer editing job. That Mr. Amerson is not without literary ability is revealed in the careful editing he did on his manuscript and in the introduction he wrote to the William Byron Rumford interview, another of the Northern California Negro Political Leaders volumes. His writing style is of a fine old vintage, as revealed by his phrasing and punctuation, which was preserved by the Office as more appropriate to this interview than the more streamlined styles of today.

Joyce A. Henderson
Interviewer-Editor

2 January 1974
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

I EARLY YEARS

Henderson: I'll start by asking you, when were you born?

Amerson: I was born June 2, 1905 in Beaumont, Texas. My father's name was Henry S. Amerson. My mother's maiden name was Matilda C. Brown.

Henderson: What were the names of both sets of grandparents?

Amerson: I only know the answers to parts of that question. My mother's mother was named Tempe Brown. Her husband was accidentally drowned when some of his children were quite young, and I do not recall his name being mentioned. My father's parents were Gray and Matilda Amerson.

Henderson: What was your father's occupation?

Amerson: He at one time was a railway mail clerk, and also a teacher before coming to California. In California he was hired and worked as a clerk for the federal government, on Mare Island Navy Yard.

Henderson: Would you call your family a pioneer family to California?

Amerson: Do you know, I don't really know what they mean by a pioneer family. I've heard many Negro people who came to California after my parents did, who are now referring to themselves as pioneers. We were not among the first families, we were not the second. When we came to Vallejo I would say there could have been perhaps two hundred Negro people there.

Henderson: And what year was it that your family came to California?

Amerson: My father came in 1908. My mother and I came in 1909.

Henderson: Do you remember much from those years? You were quite young.

Amerson: Some things I recall quite vividly; they were all so new, so different. It was my first train ride, and incidentally I yet have a peculiar fondness for trains. I prefer them to planes, even today. It was then, when I experienced my first boat ride too, and if I hadn't recently experienced a rather serious illness which sort of limits my physical mobility; today, and now, this interview would no doubt be in process in a house-boat. Years ago, to get to Vallejo was quite something. One traveling on the Southern Pacific Railroad would arrive in a little town of Port Costa (I think the town is still there) and then the train, cars including their passengers, destined to Benicia and Vallejo were ferried across the straits to Benicia. My mother told the story of how I stayed literally glued to the train window during the entire trip, even at night.

The people on the train--oh, they were nice, they were strange, they were kind--but, all those bell-rings, whistle tootings, clacketing of the wheels on the rails and then those utterly strange noises of the train going on to the boat, and men yelling at each other. Oh well, we arrived in Benicia and I finally went dead to sleep, to awaken in a strange house, the home of a Mr. and Mrs. L.J. Williams, whom my father had known in Texas.

We lived there temporarily, and later in two different houses my folks rented. The move from the first house was because of its distance from a school, the move from the second was because the property where the old home place now is located was posted for sale. It was not too far from the elementary, and the then called, grammar schools, and my parents decided to buy it. Later, in 1914, my father sent my mother and me back to Texas to live with her family while he had the original small house torn down and a new one, the present house, built.

From the location of the small house, the one later torn down, one grand day I entered the Farragut Elementary School. It was a most happy day. No, I was not afraid. I could read some, I could write, and I knew my ABC's as well as my numbers. Too, some of the pupils were my friends and recesses were wonderful. The teachers, four in number--one for each grade, as I recall, were understanding, and merely wanted their assignments completed. Two were exceedingly strict, one of the two was always ready to be helpful, the other was stern and all business; but neither of the two permitted any playing in class. That first day was something else. Incidentally it was during my second year in school when I had my first trip



Farragut Elementary School, Vallejo. May 1911
A. Wayne Amerson, first grader about to be promoted, 4th row, 5th
from left. Leroy Smith, 4th row, 6th from left. Miss Wolfe,
teacher.

Amerson: to the hospital. After I returned to class, the teacher came to our house one evening and explained to my parents that I could have a visiting teacher if daily going to school proved to be too strenuous. After she talked about the process and left, my parents turned to me and the discussion began. I recall that I developed so much protest until they decided that on a temporary basis I could go to school as usual. The trial period developed into a permanent procedure and a visiting teacher was never mentioned to me again.

Henderson: Why did your parents come to California? You told me that your father was employed as a teacher in Texas, and it would appear that the decision to move was rather quick in developing.

Amerson: They came to California in fact because of me. Both of my parents had been teachers in Texas, and both could have continued; but, there I was. You see, I was born with, what I've never really considered as, a slight handicap. At the time of birth or shortly thereafter, the attending doctor told my parents that: number one, I would no doubt need medical attention which would not be available to me in the South. Number two, if a doctor--no doubt a surgeon was found who probably could do what may be needed--there were no hospital facilities available, in those days of Southern racial segregation.

With those words uppermost in their minds, my father began his search for a way out of this dilemma and it came in the form of a nation-wide U.S. Civil Service announcement of an examination for clerks for Washington, D.C. and Mare Island Navy Yard in Vallejo, California. He had knowledge of Howard University and its medical school but fate called him from the eligible list to go to Mare Island. I understand that between the time he came and when he sent for my mother and me, he had explored all the possibilities of good medical attention in the Bay Area; so Vallejo became his and our future.

Henderson: In retrospect, what are your feelings about his decisions?

Amerson: From his standpoint, I'm not too sure. He, and my mother, could have done well anywhere. In the South, he no doubt would have been an excellent teacher; in fact, an instructor of note. He had a tremendous mind, which really was wasted in California--except for its influence upon his three sons. Today, I get annoyed with young people who finish California

Amerson: high schools and can neither read, write or spell; and then I think of him in the last month of his life, at age eighty-six, sitting around the dining room table practicing calculus problems from memories of days, many years before, and in a small Negro college in the South. I will add that during that same month when he was told by his youngest son that he had passed the California legal bar examinations and was now an attorney; the look on my father's face told us--the family--that he was a great teacher, and a tremendous father.

As for me, his decision was of the finest. When I was in the second grade, as I previously mentioned, came my first trip to a hospital. It was the first of eight such trips. I recall my first doctor--a surgeon from England--every bit an English gentleman, and we developed a mutual admiration society. When I entered the hospital, my school books went with me--they were mine, my parents had bought them for me, as did all parents in those days--and when the doctor had a free moment or two he would stop by my room and we would study my lessons together. I can still see him; straight, well chiseled features, creased with lines of kindness.

As a Negro, I came to California and Vallejo in the good years as far as Negro children were concerned. There was some prejudice though. It stemmed primarily from the Navy officers on Mare Island. Most of them were from the South, and they passed their feelings on to their children; and on occasion exercised some of their feelings on the Negro workers in the Navy Yard. My school years in Vallejo were good, generally very good, but my brothers felt the pangs that resulted from the changes in population that World War I brought. The fact is, before I left going to college in 1924--I had begun to feel the effects of discrimination. Young people with whom I had gone through school were yet all out for Wayne--but their parents had begun to learn to hold back. In terms of employment I had been rebuffed several times, and too; the Navy Yard, the Post Office, the railroad, and nigh on to no one else in those days would hire a handicapped person--so--my father and I talked about college. I am sure some of my job refusals were because of race; I am equally as sure that some were because of the handicap.

While in the public schools, my teachers generally were most helpful, many were encouragingly critical, and with few exceptions I was treated as something special. Mine were the days in Vallejo when Ivy Anderson, who was Duke Ellington's

- Amerson: first vocalist of note and when Jack Benny's Rochester and I were schoolmates; when a now prominent Negro attorney, Leroy Smith, and I entered the first grade in the Farragut School; when Elmer Claiborne started playing the trumpet and became one of the Bay Area's outstanding performers; all Negroes of recognition, who started their formative years in Vallejo at about the time of my school experiences.
- Henderson: I understand that in 1917 California experienced its first great influx of Negroes.
- Amerson: It was. It was because of, and during World War I.
- Henderson: So your family came long before then?
- Amerson: Yes, if you consider eight or nine years a long time. The first major influx came in 1917 or '18, around the time when World War I was in process. By that time though, Negroes in Vallejo had developed such organizations as the Odd Fellows, the Masons, Eastern Star, Household of Ruth, Knights of Pythias. The NAACP, Vallejo Chapter, was very prominent then because Vallejo had something that very few other communities in California had. It had a steady payroll, and it also was beginning to develop patterns of segregation and discrimination in Vallejo and on Mare Island. Vallejo is still a one industry town, and anyone who comes there usually comes because he has an appointment to work on Mare Island. Things that developed there were different from many of the things that went on in other areas because of this steady employment and continuous inflow of money. The Negro people of Vallejo were not wealthy, but they were, compared to other areas, well off.

The Negro people of Vallejo, during those years, held some of the higher offices in the various state Negro church organizations and also in some state Negro fraternal organizations. It was partially because we came from the place that had the steady income of money, and also because of the fact that many of the Negro clerks on Mare Island had been teachers, and were quite knowledgeable.

- Henderson: Are you speaking of segregated churches?
- Amerson: Yes. May I try to review the portions of this history that I recall. In the beginning what is now the American Baptist Convention, USA, had what was generally known as a missionary program of cooperation. They established missionary Baptist churches in the communities where people wanted them, if such

Amerson: church served a community need. The few Negroes in Vallejo who were desirous of church affiliation had decided that they wanted an all-Negro church shortly before my family arrived. On the basis of that decision the Northern California Baptist Convention, affiliated with the then Northern Baptist Convention, purchased a building later known as the Second Baptist Church in Vallejo. Before this decision, the Negroes had been attending the First Baptist Church and some of the Negro members reluctantly left to join an all-Negro church.

The Second Baptist Church of Vallejo was one of twenty-three or twenty-four churches, perhaps more later, that were established usually in that manner up and down the state, from Weed to Bakersfield. Yes, there was a church in Weed. These churches were brought together and represented in what was known in those days and still is, the General Baptist Association. I think a Reverend William Turner in San Francisco was the president of the General Baptist Association at the time of my last contact with him a few years ago. I don't know whether he still is.

A Mr. L. J. Williams, now deceased, was the general secretary of the association for many years, almost until he passed away, except for one year; a year I was elected. I served in different offices during my years in Vallejo, in high school, until I went to college and for the short periods of time I was in Vallejo before working in Oakland.

Henderson: About what year did you serve as general secretary?

Amerson: I don't remember exactly.

Henderson: This was after you'd had your schooling?

Amerson: Actually I don't remember if it was before I went to the University of Arizona or whether it was after I came home from Langston University. When I came home from Prairie View in 1927 I began to get involved in the community activities in which I worked before leaving; and when I returned in 1933 I again started to work in the same pattern. I really cannot answer that question.

Henderson: That's probably not as important as some of the other things I'll ask you.

Amerson: After the Vallejo church was progressing for some time, some of the people seemingly felt that they had more of a relationship

VHS Class Of '22 To Convene June 10

The Vallejo High School class of 1922, the first class to graduate from the present campus, is making plans for a gala 50-year reunion June 10 at the Redwood Inn.

Committee members in charge of arrangements for the event include Lois Heegler Cooley, Vern Camp Swoap, Gladys Rule Bailhache, Lucy Enas McLean, Ken Giant, Elsie Kielberg Lydon, Wayne Amerson, Eileen Hogan DeLaMater, and Dr. Loren Nye.

During the class of '22's senior year, the high school moved from an Ohio Street location to its present site. Class members are proud of achievements and events which occurred during their

high school years, including the inauguration of "big and little sisters" to guide freshmen students, and the establishment of Tramp Day on the campus.

Class members report that just before the move to the new campus, they participated in a radio broadcast from the home of Bill Harris, whose band played on the air. Since radio was a very young media at the time, it was a big occasion.

THE SCHOOL song "Red and White," written to the tune of "Stars and Stripes Forever," by Dorothy Marston, class of '21, was formally performed for the first time at the Class of 1922's graduation ceremonies. The

class also had a class song written by Merrill Knighton and his committee.

Class night with the theme "On the Terrace" was held at the Vallejo Country Club with fifty-one members present. Reunion committee members recall that the class gift to the school was a table and chairs.

During 1922, the 130 pound Vallejo High School basketball team was victorious over all competition provided by Central and Northern California teams, and met the Huntington Park team on Rodman Club court at Mare Island for the state champion play-off. Vallejo's participation in the championship was an important first, and the honor was felt even though the local team lost the game. A few years later state championships were discontinued.

Committee members for the June reunion are in need of assistance in locating the following class members: Alice Anderson, Thad Binkley, Fred Dartt, Leonard Davy, Isabell Deeg, Juan Domingo, William Ferera, Freddie Frazier, Curtis Henley, Collins MacCrae, Ceferino Santiago, Dorothy Piercy Hill, and Elsie Flick. Persons with information may contact Lois Cooley, 643-4639, or Kenneth Giant, 642-4601.

Vallejo Times-Herald, Tues., April 4, 1972

PAGE 5—



A FESTIVE 50-year reunion June 10 at the Redwood Inn is planned by members of Vallejo High School's class of 1922. Enjoying a recent planning session at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Giant, 407 Valle Vista Ave., were, seated, from left, Lois Heegler Cooley, Vern Camp Swoap,

Gladys Rule Bailhache, Lucy Enas McLean; and standing, Ken Giant, Elsie Kielberg Lydon, Wayne Amerson, Eileen Hogan DeLaMater, and Dr. Loren Nye.—Times-Herald Photo.

Amerson: with the old branch of the Negro National Baptist Convention. There was a church here in Oakland that was affiliated with it; in fact, it was the present North Oakland Baptist Church, and so they projected one in Vallejo related to that convention. A Mr. A. B. Caviel was the lay leader in that church activity; the one person who pushed for its development the hardest. Mr. Caviel was one of the clerks who worked on Mare Island at the time. The movement brought about a division in the membership of the Second Baptist Church, and a resulting two Negro Baptist churches; one in harmony with the Northern California Baptist Convention, the other related to the Boyd faction of the Negro Baptist movement headquartered in the South.

Somewhere in time; after World War I started, and the population was growing, some of the people who were Methodists eventually started a Methodist Church. That was quite a story. After meeting in various halls, the Bishop assigned a minister to Vallejo, and Kyles Temple Methodist Church came into being. They found a lot and they were moving an old church building to the lot. It was, I think, the old Methodist Church. I'm not sure. As they were moving it down the street, and they placed it on the lot, someone set it on fire and it burned down.

Henderson: They had no idea who burned it down?

Amerson: Many had ideas as to who it was, but I don't think anyone was ever brought to trial or convicted for having been involved.

Henderson: Do you think it had any racial overtones?

Amerson: We felt sure it did. I think it ruined the family that everyone thought had done it. Nevertheless, it was one of the bad scenes of the day. Incidentally the building went down our street. I remember that some people became so emotional until they threw rocks on our front porch. The next morning Dad telephoned the Navy yard and took the day off from work, and we, he and I, went to San Francisco. There he bought one of the finest repeating rifles I have ever seen in my life and he brought it home and said, "Now, everybody has a gun."

Henderson: That gun was for you?

Amerson: No, I had one already.

Henderson: Oh.

Amerson: Incidentally, my mother was a better shot than I, and my father was quite good.

Henderson: There was an outcome of the church burning?

Amerson: Yes, a new church was built on the lot, and the church still stands at the corner of Illinois and Sonoma Streets. I imagine it may soon be removed from that location because they're widening Sonoma Street to make it a highway arterial. It is expected the state will have to take some of the ground the church now stands on, and more than likely will buy the entire lot.

Henderson: I don't know if you gave me the name of the church or not.

Amerson: Kyles Temple, A.M.E. Zion Church, named after Bishop Kyle.

Henderson: This is great because we've been wanting to get some local black church history.

Amerson: I didn't know that that's what you wanted. As I mentioned, because of my two rather lengthy periods of being out of the state there were breaks in my activity in the program of the levels of organization of the Baptist in California; however soon after my return in 1933 I found myself again almost totally involved. As a visitor I attended the annual meeting of the General Baptist Association and was approached by Rev. J. T. Muse of Sacramento to take over the editorship of the General Baptist, a quarterly he launched early in 1933. I finally agreed and one fine day he came to my house with copies of both previous issues, a large box of sundry suggested articles, an article he had written about me and relating to an impromptu talk I had given at the association meeting and later put into a letter to the Sunday school superintendents; and with that I was to produce issue number three. I did and continued until I began as an employee of the State Relief Administration. I resigned because I felt that in terms of just plain physical distance it was an impossible situation. I was living in Vallejo, working in Richmond, and Rev. Muse lived and was a minister in Sacramento. Later, when I was transferred to Vallejo he endeavored to enlist my services again--this time however it was to edit a weekly newspaper directed to the Negro population of Sacramento. I considered it would not be a satisfactory arrangement, unless I could be employed in Sacramento and live there.

Sunday School Associational Program In Open Letter

President Announces

Three Objectives



A. WAYNE AMERSON
Pres. of S. S. Dept.
Editor of General Baptist

The term 'swamped' could never give justice to the position in which we found our new editor and president of the Sunday School department as we visited him several days ago in his office. Though positive that Editor Amerson would spurn any pity and sympathy offered, we felt a certain amount of anxiety for him and his work. Working in feverish haste with data of all descriptions, he has produced, within the last month, charts containing graphical pictures that would set the hair of an efficient religious worker on end. He has taken his local work by the halter and is, against innumerable odds, leading the work of the young people on to an effective organization.

In view of all the above, our president is doing a noble and very complimentary piece of work in tabulating Sunday School statistics; delving into the situations of each school and mapping out a tentative program. You no doubt, wondered why I considered offering such an untiring, efficient person, pity. The reason is, that Mr. Amerson is contributing his service for no returns whatsoever, except the mental satisfaction he no doubt derives from the service he is rendering. The work he is engaging himself in for the benefit of the entire General Baptist Association has never been attempted before within our field, yet all the expenses attached to his efforts are being wholly borne by him.

I believe I am beside my story, for I am supposed to give you a report on a most interesting interview. In answer to a query on his plans for the associational year, I was handed the following letter:

To the Sunday School Superintendents
Of the Churches of the General
Baptist Association.
Greetings:

As president of the Sunday School work of the General Baptist Association for the year of 1933-34 I wish you a very successful year's work in the service of the Master. It will be my endeavor to aid you in this service to the fullest extent of my capacity, and I solicit your prayers and co-operation.

We have adopted as objectives for the Sunday school work, the following:

1. Spiritual growth of the church, community and the individual through the medium of the Sunday School.
2. A systematic unification of the work of the Sunday School department of the General Baptist Association.
3. A stimulation of Christian service within various communities through the Sunday School.
 - a. Increased attendance total; ten per cent (10%) of total Negro population of the particular community.
 - b. Better methods of organization.
 - c. Better methods of instruction.
 - d. Answering the needs and demands of the communities.

It is felt that during these strenuous times, when it has become so necessary to organize our many efforts into one supreme endeavor, we could no doubt achieve more if a program is mapped out which will include the probable realization of all three objectives.

Each community, each Sunday School is a separate and distinct problem within itself, so in order to formulate an adequate program for the realization of our present objectives, we are studying separately each Sunday School of the General Baptist Association, its progress, its present program and its needs. Despite the fact that I have on hand considerable statistical data, I can be of little or no assistance without your support. To this end I would that the superintendents of each Sunday School would kindly remember me in their prayers and also give me a complete report on their schools. I would greatly appreciate the receipt of information telling me the total Negro population within your city, the total number of classes in your Sunday School with the age range of each class, and lastly I would that you would list any or all of your difficulties under the headings of organization and instruction, including a brief statement of each difficulty.

Looking forward to your prompt co-operation in the matter, I remain yours for a very successful year of 1934.

Faithfully yours,

A. WAYNE AMERSON.

Quoting President Amerson, "The work is handicapped due to the lack of adequate funds but I feel there is a great deal that can be done now to advance the cause of Christ with what little we have, if the supreme sacrifice was made. On the whole we are losing ground, for no reason at all but our own negligence and lack of fore-sight. The time has arrived when Christian leaders should first carefully consider all facts and make sure they are right and then diligently carry out their programs. In the General Baptist Association we for years have been drifting about on some very inadequate plans, looking forward to objectives that were considered on the basis of our work before the war and as a result we are very definitely losing ground. We have little else to do now but set our souls and bodies to the task. For the Sunday School department I intend to construct a working program which with possibly few changes will be applicable to each

school of the field. It is my desire to use the columns of the General Baptist to carry on a certain amount of the work."

So ended our interview with our president. We felt as though we had been in the company of a strategist for as we scanned his various projects we were caught with the urge to invest our services. Plans for what would mean from five to seven per cent increased attendance; plans for budgets; courses of studies on methods, departments, administration and even Baptist fellowship; all evolving out of one month's compilation of data and years of training. "God's blessings," to our new editor and president.

Amerson: At the annual meeting in 1933 I had been elected as president of the State Sunday School department of the Association. Under the International Council of Religious Education I began enrolling in and qualifying to teach some four or five of the courses of the Leadership Curriculum with the idea that I could aid the Sunday schools of the Association. Aside from giving training at one of the Convention programs, I was invited to teach one or more of the courses in the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches of Napa, the First Baptist and the First Christian Churches of Vallejo, and also the Presbyterian Church of Fresno.

Henderson: Were these Negro churches?

Amerson: No, they were all churches with white congregations.

Henderson: You were working with integration as a policy quite early?

Amerson: Yes, very early; almost all my life, except during my college years at Prairie View, and my years of teaching at Langston. In 1938, '39 I was chairman of the Worship Committee for the annual meeting of the Baptist Young People's Union of the Northern California Baptist Convention.

Henderson: Are you yet active with the Baptist Church?

Amerson: No.

Henderson: What happened? There must be a story.

Amerson: I hardly know how to answer that question; however, I'll try to follow through chronologically. In 1936 when I went to the Oakland office of the Relief Administration, I moved to Oakland and then decided to change my church membership to the then Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church of Berkeley. Though I was requested to teach the Leadership Training Courses in various white denominational church schools and young people's groups I was unable to generally project the idea of need among the Negro churches. I am sure you are about to ask, "Why?"; and all I can reply to that question is, "I really do not know." I have some ideas, but I actually do not know. The Association recommended and the Convention assisted in the paying of a salary to a person as a director of religious education to serve the Negro churches in the Association, but eventually that effort was apparently determined as being non-productive, and terminated.

Amerson:

Back to your original question--I, worried with program or lack of it, went to annual and quarterly meetings of the Negro Association and the Bay District Convention and at the same time was heavily involved in programs, of the parent bodies. In the Northern California Convention, efforts were made to involve the Negro ministers but few accepted or responded. For years, I was the only Negro member of the Northern California-Nevada Council of Churches; and then one day I went to the Negro Baptist Association annual meeting, I believe in 1946. My childish memories of trains ended in my deciding not to take my car and as a result I was essentially compelled to stay close to the meetings, including the little caucus meetings. That was unfortunate, for I observed the pulling and pushing that developed in the nominating committee. It resulted in the non-presentation of the name of a person, who because of their many years of holding a certain position, felt they should be re-nominated--and nomination generally meant re-election. The position to my mind, paid practically no money (less than two hundred dollars) and really had no prestige, away from the Association; however, this person broke down and cried. That incident so forcefully struck me, I immediately began to evaluate where the entire movement was, where it had been, and in my mind where it could or rather would go in terms of progressive impact on a community.

For some several years, a little over three in fact, I had been wandering about from one church movement to another, always however holding my ties with what is now the McGee Avenue Baptist Church of Berkeley, the Baptist Convention parent bodies, and the Council of Churches, but also dividing my time with other religious ventures. I was aware that of the many individuals here because of the World War II activity, large numbers were not of the Baptist or Methodist persuasion.

Through my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Clark, the latter a co-worker in the Relief Administration, I learned that: they, members of the Congregational Church, were interested in establishing such a church in a less affluent neighborhood; that the Presbyterian State and National Boards were aware of the fact that there were Negro members of the Presbyterian faith in San Francisco and also in the East Bay Area; and that problems of living in the total Bay Area gave significance to a successful experiment of co-operative living in San Francisco. To each of these challenges, the denominations involved resolved to spend some missionary out-reach money and to each eventually they either assigned and/or brought in leadership. In each of

Amerson: them I took active roles in their early development.

With the Clark family I attended many of the early organizing meetings, became a friend of Dr. Buell Gallagher and made suggestions and contributions to aid the development of South Berkeley Community Congregational Church. With the co-op housing unit in San Francisco, members of which lived in a large building vacated by the Japanese who were removed during the war, I found a more valid relationship. A Dr. Alfred Fiske, a Presbyterian minister and also a professor at San Francisco State College, had become interested in the group, some of them having been involved in evening discussion groups he and his wife held at their home. Because he felt that co-op movement could register an impact on some of the lives of the newly establishing citizenry in San Francisco, he gave of himself and his time; and the group expanded to the point of the enlistment of the services of a Mr. Manley Johnson, a divinity school student and a personal friend of mine; with aid for the continuance of the project coming from the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., I assume as a missionary enterprise. Interestingly enough, my first knowledge of the venture came in the form of questions from an interested person who had been in attendance at one of my earlier mentioned Leadership Training classes. This venture developed in to what is now known as "The Church for the Fellowship of All People" or generally referred to as Fellowship Church of San Francisco with Dr. Howard Thurman as minister.

What started as occasional visits on my part has carried me to an involved membership, one of the members of the board signing the Articles of Incorporation, and member and past president of the board of trustees for several terms. I am yet a member of the Church and suggest you just may find "Footprints of a Dream" by Dr. Howard Thurman, a very interesting and challenging history of Fellowship Church.

My third involvement was again with a Presbyterian venture. During the early summer of 1945 a Rev. John Dillingham,* a Presbyterian minister, was assigned and arrived in Oakland to explore the possibilities of developing a center in West Oakland by the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. West Oakland, over-crowded, and with the major problem of job lay-offs after the war; was considered by that denomination's national board as being in need of much aid to prevent clashes between the races and also the "Haves and the have-nots." Where he got my name, I guess I'll never know, but one evening

*Rev. John Dillingham, 1896-1974. See Appendix, p. 95, for letter from Rev. Dillingham, and obituary by G. James Fleming.

Amerson: there was a knock at my door and the Rev. Dillingham introduced himself and I invited him in. He told me his mission, his problems as he saw them, his references (who incidentally included the Dr. Stanley Hunter, pastor of the Berkeley Presbyterian Church), and finally that he needed my help. We arranged his meeting of some several community-knowledgeable persons, most of whom were willing to serve, as did I, on his original Center Board. Eventually this Center became the Faith Presbyterian Church of Oakland; however, its intervening formative years were involved with an inter-racial Well-Baby Clinic; the headquarters of the Keeton Chorus; and an area community center of activity and learning groups, as well as a church home for many Negro Presbyterians who came to California and the East Bay during the war efforts.

Henderson: You have had a very active life in church related activities; have you ever had the impulse or perhaps taken the time to assess the value of your efforts?

Amerson: On occasion I have tried to look at the results, hardly in terms of value as such, but generally in relation to the kinds of impacts on the community, and individuals including myself.

With the Baptists, I guess I can sum up my total efforts in saying that I lent encouragement to the parent bodies' overall interracial efforts. I learned to know and worked with many prominent leaders of the Northern California Baptist Convention, as Dr. Sanford Fleming, Rev. Stanley Gillett, Dr. John W. Baily, all of whom in their own level of operation endeavored to include minority workers in to the state level of the parent body. The Convention created a position of a field secretary in charge of race relations and originally appointed a Miss Mildred Johnson to the job.

Many of the inroads made with the Negro young people's work at that time were made as result of her tireless efforts with groups. Usually I was the person of introduction and provided her with an entrée for her programs. After some several years she resigned to take on another job, and she was followed by a Miss Bernice Cofer. I'm told, her first instructions were to find me; and she did. I tried to review the past years of activity and she began to develop her plans of operation. Somewhere in all of this they developed a mutual admiration society; she being fooled to thinking I was great, and I absolutely sure she was most capable and

Amerson: wonderful. In spite of our personal thoughts, today I would say that much of her success was with the youth from the white churches. Youth from the Negro churches would become involved for a specific program but refused to accept continuity of the inter-racial approach. She was (and is) a tremendous person; her program, approach and follow-through was well organized and I am sure her efforts brought about a broadened understanding of minority group problems among the youth from the white churches. Her successes in this area resulted in an offer and a promotion to do the same type of thing for the American Baptist Convention, U.S.A. on a national level. She yet is one of my fondest and strongest supporters, and I daily live in fear that some unknown time she will rise up on a soap-box and start running me for President.

Of the two ventures of church development in the East Bay I think both served a significant role in 'keeping the lid' on a potential 'powder-keg' situation following the war. Of South Berkeley Congregational Community Church, it had a strong inter-racial leadership in Dr. Buell Gallagher and the Rev. Roy Nichols. Both men tirelessly worked with community areas of North Oakland and Berkeley; both men took their active places around the many conference tables of city government of both cities; the church building was available to community groups working toward the same goals, and in that area it was the meeting place of the Berkeley Interracial Committee. The church yet has an on-going program but is struggling to maintain its inter-racial involvement.

In the case of Faith Presbyterian Church, it no longer carries its community programs which gave cause for inter-racial involvement. New and young ministers since the departure of Rev. Dillingham have apparently determined that their destiny is in a separate, and a 'black' church. It does serve Negro Presbyterians in the area and for that I am glad but again, I am of the opinion that this world is too small for the continued projection of the philosophy of separatism.

Today, I have a hunch that given the same set of circumstances I just might do it all over again. The combined efforts of many understanding residents of the community along with the leadership and drive of a Dr. George W. Phillips of the Tenth Avenue Baptist Church, a Dr. Harold Geistweit of the Lakeshore Baptist Church, and a Rev. Ingles of the Piedmont Avenue Congregational Church, linked with the cooperation of the Negro ministers of the Baptist and Methodist Churches in

Amerson: Berkeley and Oakland helped to keep a little isle of sanity in a boiling caldron of confusion after the war. If for no other reason than my limited involvements in such a cause, I think the results were worth the efforts and I would do a repeat performance under the same set of circumstances.

Without the benefit of that setting, today I'm becoming almost human. By that I mean I am tempted to believe that in terms of community development churches in general are going no where or at least have not determined where they are headed, and generally do not really know how they expect to get there. Because of distance I shall soon have to assess Fellowship Church as a memory, one of my most pleasant ones; and then I'll do like normal people. I'll find a church where I feel comfortable, where the program and the minister are challenging enough to keep me alive and awake, and that is where I'll attend.

Don't look so shocked, my kind interviewer. Someday, you too will approach the "Senior Citizen" period of life, and you too will have to make adjustments. I may even have to get my religious services by radio or television and so might you. When that day comes, make sure today that you can look back on your earlier years and say, "I tried, I did my best to make this world a better place in which people can live."

Incidentally in the town of Vallejo, there is another story of import. Included in the advent of the eight or nine men who were clerks on the Mare Island Navy Yard, came a man by the name of Mr. Charles Toney. He had quite a number of children and I don't know why he felt that he just couldn't keep working on Mare Island Navy Yard. He would work a while and then he'd stop. Finally, he quit altogether. He then started a Negro school, and appealed to the state to get young Negro people; many, wards of the state, to attend a boarding school that he had established. Most of the rest of the Negro people in Vallejo generally were opposed to the school and they finally took it and him to court and made him close the school.

Henderson: Why were they opposed?

Amerson: No one wanted segregation. In most instances that's why they left the South. They just didn't want more of racial segregation. It was their hope that as they left the South, they were leaving that sort of thing behind.

Time to Act

The State of California has joined the movement to close the Vallejo Industrial and Normal Institute. This was done after representatives of the Department of Social Welfare made a thorough investigation of the local Negro school and found it sadly lacking in sanitary standards and educational requirements.

For a long time efforts to close this school have been under way. Leaders among the local Negro residents have long sought to wipe out what they considered a blot on their race. Gradually they have won strong support for their cause and it now appears that they will attain the desired goal.

The State means business. It considers the Toney school a menace to the Negro people, a disgrace to Vallejo and California. If the conditions uncovered in the initial investigations are established beyond doubt, the institute will be closed without formality or delay.

The investigation made by the state authorities and its results indicate clearly that personal animosity to the school or its proprietor has no part in the affair. It is simply a case of protecting society from a menace. For a good many years charitable people have been giving support to this school, believing it to be a deserving institution. What the state investigators have discovered shows that good people were being misled.

On the basis of the facts brought to light, the Toney school can do nothing but harm for Vallejo. It brings discredit upon the Negro people. If allowed to continue, it will be an unending source of criticism and shame.

The time to act has come. Investigation has established the necessity of action. It should be taken without further delay.

SCHOOL FOR COLORED HERE IS ABATED BY COURT EDICT

Battle of Vallejo Negro Forces is Ended When Judge Closes up School

Affairs of Colored Normal Institute are Recounted in Windup of Court Suit

TIMES - HERALD BUREAU, FAIRFIELD, Oct. 15. — Superior Judge W. T. O'Donnell today issued an order closing the Vallejo Industrial and Normal Institute for Negroes.

Judge O'Donnell's decision ended a long fight between the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and Prof. C. H. Toney, principal of the school.

While trouble has been existing between the association and Prof. Toney for a long time, it was not brought to a head until three months ago, when papers were filed against Toney seeking abatement of the school on the grounds that he was morally unfit to conduct such an institution.

Included in the complaint were the charges that he was conducting the institute in an atmosphere detrimental to the morals of the children and that he was a too vicious and immoral person to be in attendance with girl students.

TEACHER TESTIMONY RECALLED

During the course of the trial it was brought out in testimony that Miss Ione Coleman, teacher, had left the school after Prof. Toney was alleged to have made certain advances toward her. Miss Coleman claimed, while on the witness stand, that when she would not accede to his wishes, he fired her. She was employed at the school for only a few weeks.

Other witnesses testified as to the condition of the school and to his morals. The books of the institute were brought into the case as testimony. It was revealed while Prof. Toney was on the witness stand that there was only one student in the school this semester, that a Negro girl from Texas. She claimed to be 20 years old.

It was further brought out at the trial that the school thrived on the money received from solicited contributions from citizens in Napa, Solano, Yolo and other counties.

Amerson: There are reasons why people do not want segregation. Principally, there is no way that any two things can be equal unless they are machine made. Two or more of anything else can never be equal. Even if they're twins they are not treated equally. The parents don't treat them equally even though they try; they don't weigh the same, in fact nothing is equal. When it comes to the matter of the equality of man, one can never capitalize on the principle of equality if you have separation. As long as there is developed and produced total integration, you have the best chances of obtaining equality; in education and opportunity. Generally in an integrated system whatever is put forth; if the majority race wants their child to have the best, one as a member of a minority race is there also to get the full benefit of that best!

Here in this area not long ago, I kept a file on the busing situation, especially in San Francisco. There, one of the principals admitted that he knew the storekeeper who passed out the supplies. He also was one of the older, in terms of tenure, principals in the city. Seemingly, and he admitted, he could go down and get all the equipment and supplies he needed and consequently his school never wanted for anything. Now, let us consider Hunter's Point, they haven't anything, in comparison, I understand. Here is a man who is a teacher and has such low principles that he's going to take too much in supplies and deny young people at Hunter's Point. Why? Because they're not of his race? Integrity on his part should have insured the opportunity for all children having sufficient materials and books! For a long time I kept a notation on record of a day when at McClymonds High School, students didn't have paper to write on. That condition could have never happened at Skyline High.

Henderson: What do you suppose was Mr. Toney's reason for setting up this school in Vallejo?

Amerson: I wish I really knew. Mr. Toney professed and had been ordained as a Baptist preacher, I believe, while he was in the South. Incidentally, he hired and brought a teacher to his school in Vallejo. She still lives, in Oakland, now. She was never certified by the state of California, to my knowledge, and never taught after leaving Mr. Toney's school.

Henderson: Where had she come from?

Amerson: I don't know, however, he traveled about the state; and was

Amerson: able to influence many people, including many Caucasian people into believing that this was the best approach to the education of the young Negro; and as a result, received an awful lot of money for the enterprise. I am sure there are clippings related to him, the school, and the court hearings; and I'll try to find them.*

*Mr. Amerson has deposited clippings related to C.H. Toney in The Bancroft Library.

II THE CALIFORNIA STATE RELIEF ADMINISTRATION

Henderson: My next question is how did you happen to get a job in the State Relief Administration?

Amerson: Just another episode in my life. I made my own choice in going to Langston University, in the state of Oklahoma and in some respects it was a very bad one. The governor can not succeed himself in that state, or at least could not in 1929. When the new governor was elected, he fired the president and all of the staff of Langston except eight. I was one of those who was fired. He also fired other presidents and staffs of state colleges and universities in Oklahoma.

Soon, I learned of a job that was to be open in Tuscon and returned to Arizona. I started trying to get said job. I had been promised the position, and in fact, had the key to the school. It was an elementary school and I was to be the principal. Then something strange happened, and the brother of one of the most active bootleggers in Tuscon got the job. Putting the picture all together; I said, "I'll never teach another day," and packed up my bags and came home to Vallejo.

When I arrived home, the Depression was in process, and Mr. Roosevelt had started on a number of programs providing for projects, and I sat down and developed a project. In those days, educational projects had to be approved by the state department of education, before the public school adopted them. If they were approved by the state, the public school seemingly had to adopt them--as the package was presented. I wrote out my idea of a project, sent it in, and apparently they conferred with the superintendent of schools. One day a representative from the state department of education came to our house, and he began talking about the project with me. For some reason my mother sat in the room and she heard what was being said. We were a pretty close knit family, and in

Amerson: fact I was glad that she was staying on. He told me various aspects that they liked about the project, and that it had been approved, and that Vallejo could start the project except that there was a problem. I said, "Problem?" "Yes," he replied. "The superintendent of schools has not reconciled himself to the idea that you would be in charge of the project and in effect would be supervising teaching staffs." And I said, "Oh?" And he said, "Yes."

I went to high school with his son and we had been friends, but that mattered not. Apparently I was not wanted as supervisor of that project. The gentleman from the state gave me a choice. He said that it was probable that over the protest I just might be hired anyway, but such an unfavorable situation might ruin me career wise. On the other hand, if I decided to not depend on such pressure assignment, then some other opening would be found for me, and soon.

After he left, I kept kicking this around in my mind, and my mother kept talking. When my father came home, she told him what had happened, and in detail. Occasionally I got a word in edgewise. After dinner he decided that he had some work to do in the yard and asked if I would help him. So we went out in the yard. The job he had to do was to determine what I was thinking. He finally said, "You know, Mama is pretty edgy. The decision is yours, however. Whatever you decide to do, I'm backing you."

The next morning I called the gentleman and told him to find me another job. Two days later I started to work at the State Relief Administration in Richmond; the first Negro to be hired in the State Relief Administration in the state.

Henderson: Was the state government hiring Negroes quite readily?

Amerson: No, I was number one in that department, in the state. That was in 1933.

Henderson: How were you able to break the barrier?

Amerson: Because the agency in Northern California had two very understanding people: one, the area manager of Contra Costa and Solano County; and the other, the social welfare supervisor of the Contra Costa-Solano County area.

Henderson: What were their names?

Amerson: The area manager was Mr. Glenn Stout. And the social services supervisor was Mrs. Lemphi Hayes. As I recall, she had a master's degree in social welfare from Boston. I'm told (because I was not there) that the day before I arrived Mrs. Hayes called her staff together and in words to the effect said, "I know you wonder why I'm calling this staff meeting. Well, I'll tell you. Tomorrow we're going to have a new employee on the staff." And everybody looked at each other; and wondered what in the world was happening. They had never been called together before to be told they were going to have a new staff member. She continued, "I thought I should tell you, because the gentleman coming in is a Negro, and I may also advise that he has as much or more experience, and education from good schools than perhaps anyone else in this room except, perhaps, myself. Also, I might add if any of you don't like it, you may just take your hats and leave." No one left, and some of those people who were in that staff meeting are still some of my very, very good friends.

Henderson: What year did you come to work at SRA?

Amerson: Nineteen thirty-three. They assigned me as supervisor of the budget control section. All budgets for all claimants of SRA in Contra Costa-Solano County were reviewed in my section. Later, they broke Solano County out of the area and put it into the Sacramento area. When they did, they sent me to Vallejo as office supervisor; there also was a social service supervisor, and the management came out of Sacramento. I stayed there until there was perfected a process whereby State Relief Administration was no longer needed there; because WPA could certify people directly to work as they came for aid. It was then that the Vallejo SRA office was closed and I was sent to Oakland.

In Alameda County the Welfare Department maintained a segregated process of caseloads; and Negro case workers were assigned all Negro caseloads. I chose to be the assignment clerk for the Alameda County SRA caseload. During the time I maintained the prior established pattern of integrated caseloads, hence, at no time did any worker in SRA ever have a segregated caseload.

Henderson: You had a choice of becoming the assignment clerk?

Amerson: Yes, because when I came to Oakland many of the supervisory staff, who were in Oakland, knew me from Richmond or Vallejo. I was able to talk very freely with them, and they understood

Amerson: where I stood, and I think they respected me for it. In fact, Mr. Stout came to me one day when I was in the Richmond office and told me about the potential opening of a CCC in Contra Costa County, and asked me if I wanted to be the director of it. I began asking questions, and finally said, "Well, let me think about it." In the process of 'thinking about it' (because I took many of the Negro papers and read them as I do now), I learned that in the East a pattern had been set in the opening of segregated CCC camps. I went back to him and asked, "Is this going to be a segregated camp?" And he kind of smiled and said, "Yes, that is what I have learned." I said, "You know exactly how I feel about that." He said, "Yes." To which I said, "I thank you very much for thinking about me, but I don't want it." At least he gave me the opportunity of choice, for the salary of such an appointment was several times more than I was earning.

Henderson: What was the reaction of other welfare officials to your not letting blacks have the segregated caseloads?

Amerson: Such a pattern did not obtain in Northern California, and it was merely my intention to not permit it without a fight. It wasn't a matter of "letting." I don't think any of the Negro workers wanted a segregated caseload either, in those days. All this "black" business has come in the last ten years.

Years ago if somebody called a Negro "black"; before they could get anything else out, the Negro would endeavor to adjust their thinking. Black was attached to something that just wasn't quite regular in referring to Negro people. "Black" is something that youth have brought in and are trying to sell and make work, but essentially, I don't think it can. First, it isn't so, and second, they are trying to sell the wrong thing. There are things that are hard to fight against, and they are all wrapped up in people. If you ask small children what they think when someone says "black" to them, they will say, "haunted house, dark of the night, death, dirt," all the things that are negative. And what do you think they will reply when one asks what you think about when one says, "white?" "Ivory soap, ninety-nine percent pure, clean, angels, weddings," all the things that are nice. Meringue on a lemon pie. Everything nice. Actually, when you start this black business you're fighting for a positive result with a negative approach.

The other thing about this reference to black is, I don't think the average person who walks the street has seen six

- Amerson: black people in all their life! There are very few people whom you see, you cannot tell where the skin ends and the hair begins. Therefore, they have to be some shade of brown; black is absolute. There are no shades of black, it is just black, period. How in the world can you tell me that this is a black race when there are people who belong to it that are as light as any white person you've ever seen? Incidentally, I went with a young lady from Houston, Texas in 1924 who was as fair of skin as almost anyone you have seen in Oakland. That was a long time ago, long before legal integration started in the South, and it was in the South.
- Henderson: Did you find that the Negro social workers who took on integrated caseloads were able to compete with their white counterparts?
- Amerson: No one was really competing, they were just performing their jobs and with some of them perhaps far above the average worker. In fact, for two of the people, the whites would have been the ones who were trying to catch up. Incidentally one of the Negro workers was one of the founding members of the South Berkeley Congregational Church and a graduate of the University of California School of Social Work.
- Henderson: Who was that?
- Amerson: Mrs. Laura B. Clark. She's now deceased. And the other one was Reverend Daniel G. Hill, then minister of the First A.M.E. Methodist Church.
- Henderson: Do you feel your policy set some kind of precedent in the welfare department?
- Amerson: No, not really. As for Alameda County, I do not know what their policy is, but I have reason to believe they have fairly integrated caseloads now. In Northern California; SRA, and everyone in the program worked out the idea of integration just fine. No one was hurt. There were no problems from integrated caseloads to my knowledge. I do not know what happened in Southern California; I had no way of telling.
- Henderson: When you became supervisor of assigning caseloads, where were you working at that time?
- Amerson: I supervised the process in Vallejo, then later in Oakland.
- Henderson: And prior to your coming here, the caseloads were not segregated?
- Amerson: They were not segregated and I continued the pattern.

Amerson:

Before we leave the State Relief Administration, it was in that agency and in the Richmond office I became alerted to the plight of the handicapped person. Working with the budgets allowed me to observe, and I was shocked to note that the handicapped person could receive but \$2.10 a week if they lived at home, and if not, and were unemployable, they were referred to county welfare. The bad and very sad next sequence in this operation was that welfare at best was usually far from being something that could be desired; and in some counties, non-existent. To further challenge my thoughts in this area was the fact that in Richmond I had acquired a friend who had a mild case of epilepsy. With the help of his parents he had completed a course in radio repair but could find no employer; and since he could not drive, even sympathetic employers felt they could not hire him. Too, workmen's compensation requirements precluded his being hired. I knew the office manager of the Vallejo office of employment referrals which was the federal forerunner of the Department of Employment. Many conferences with a Mr. Keating suggested to me that my friend was not going to be hired; however, we did develop an idea of starting an organization of handicapped persons and tried to gain some county and state consideration.

We, Mr. Keating and I, began to encourage each handicapped person living in Vallejo to join an organization we proposed to organize; and in Vallejo, during the summer of 1934 we held the organizing meeting of the Solano County Handicapped League. The following month, I think in July the group elected officers and I was elected president. My handicapped friend and his parents had come to our meeting from Richmond; and he and Mr. Keating put on quite a little campaign which resulted in my election as president. By vote the group authorized me to write the state legislature and as of September 10, 1934, a letter was written to Senator Thomas McCormack and on September 12, of the same year, it was read before the senate in session and appeared in the Senate Journal of that date, on page 17. There was a resulting upward revision of the SRA allowances for handicapped persons, and I was told the Department of Rehabilitation began to exercise more direction in aiding the handicapped person to choose a job from the training program; but much more was and yet is needed to aid the handicapped.

Henderson: Was this another first?

Amerson: I just don't know. I had not heard of such an organization with the purpose, to bring their problems and basic needs to the attention of government and the public, before. I have a feeling that I was the first Negro elected as president of such a county organization. Many years later, on the insistence of the Oakland Employment Office manager, Mr. Kristich, I was prevailed on to serve on the Alameda County Committee for Employment of the Handicapped Advisory Council.

COMMUNICATION.

The following communication was received, and upon request of Senator McCormack, ordered printed in the Journal: ✓

VALLEJO, CALIFORNIA, September 10, 1934.

*Senator Thomas McCormack, State Legislature,
Capitol, Sacramento, California.*

DEAR SIR: Noting that one of the major problems to be considered in the coming extra session of the State Legislature is that of the unemployed, I wish to call to your attention a phase of the same which thus far has been frightfully neglected.

According to the best information I can receive there are in this State some several thousand individuals who actually need sympathy but would rather have the opportunity to work in order that they might clothe and feed themselves and where it is expedient, raise a family.

As president of Solano County Handicapped League, I am issuing this request: That you kindly consider these unfortunates who thus far have received no aid, who because of the very handicap that makes it necessary to receive charity, can not; who throughout the Federal and State emergency programs have been almost completely ignored and in some communities totally forgotten. Admission and gratefulness in the form of training has been expressed and offered by the rehabilitation program, but it still does not answer the needs of hungry mouths, ragged clothes, urgent medical care and special concessions and appliances usually needed by such people. It is very discouraging to face the constant negations of employers who ruthlessly and pitilessly cut down expense in order to make more profits and fear entanglements with prevailing Workmen's Compensation Insurance laws.

The situation is partially outlined as follows: Because we have no means with which to work and even our correspondence is carried on at a great expense to some few who are willing to sacrifice to try to carry on our activities, our investigations are not complete and in some instances we can but approximate. In Solano County there are possibly between 35 and 50 individuals who are physically handicapped. These people, raised in the environment of good schools, commercial and social progress, and an atmosphere of adventure, all have a sense of pride, have ambitions, desires, actual needs, dreams of comfortable homes, wives and probably children, but each of these anticipations demands a job, the means of a livelihood. Under the present laws the liability clauses concerning the first and second injury do not satisfactorily protect the employer and hence provides a loophole through which he dodges to keep from hiring the handicapped worker. Because of his physical status the handicapped worker can not qualify for civil service

positions and if he is fortunate enough to get something to do, he is oftentimes replaced by some stalwart, able-bodied person who could well afford to take a chance on the world and what it may have to offer. Throughout the emergency relief the handicapped person has proven to be the "Forgotten Man." According to Administrative Bulletin No. 19, of the S. E. R. A., handicapped persons who are skilled will be given equal consideration in placement and those who lack the skill will be provided training through the Rehabilitation Department. This particular bulletin reads well but the big flaw is that in most of the smaller communities there are no projects being launched by the Emergency Relief Administrations except those calling for skill in wielding a pick and shovel, and no amount of training could equip a man with a deformed back to stand in a ditch and throw dirt. Many counties throughout the State have not produced the first project that would include the clerical worker, or that could give the handicapped person an hour's work. On the other hand the emergency relief setup again fails the handicapped person, when in its budget based on the Okey-Hunnington budget, a single man living where he pays no rent is allowed to earn through the channels of their setup approximately \$2.10 a week in Solano County. The absurdity of such is breath-taking. Consider an individual; crippled from birth, unable to receive adequate training; twenty, thirty and even forty years of age and without that first day's work; forced to live on the charity of relatives because he requires a substantial and reliable roof over his head, because he must eat good and wholesome food, because he must give his pain-racked body certain regular personal care; compelled to wear special clothes that cost extra, bandages and appliances that no charitable organization can or does provide, and numerous other needs of the deformed; then to be instructed he can earn just \$2.10 a week through the emergency agency, because they are living under the roof of some one who is employed, relatives who for years have taken care of the emergency without any aid from any source. Because of living under these same roofs, these crippled, forgotten people are not even eligible for charity from many county relief rolls, and the same is provided as far as possible only through sympathy and not in accordance with the law that prevails.

The Solano County Handicapped League petitions you to consider our desire to live, our needs for the coming winter, and to make a stand in order that we might receive some aid for people who have been unemployed and meeting an emergency practically all of their lives.

Yours truly,

SOLANO COUNTY HANDICAPPED LEAGUE.

A. WAYNE AMERSON, President.

III THE CALIFORNIA STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Henderson: When did you start working for the State Employment Service?

Amerson: As I recall, when things looked like we (the United States) were going to get involved in a world-wide fracas, SRA began to cut back as people became employed, in what proved to be potential war industry. I believe that on June 21, 1941, the State Relief Administration closed down. I was on several state lists, and received an offer from the department of employment first. As I look back on it, I may have made an error in the choice, but nevertheless, I was stuck with it and stayed with it. Too, in terms of the needs for my race, there was no involvement more demanding than that of employment, and I did the best I could to serve a community.

The Employment Service Personnel Office sent me an assignment to Bishop, California, and I drove to Sacramento, to the Department of Employment Personnel section, and pleaded my case; indicating that it wouldn't be advisable for me to take an assignment in Bishop because I had found that Bishop had no Negro residents. It was also equal distance away from several locations, like Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and nowhere.

I also pleaded my case to the fact that it became 110 degrees below zero in the winter and a 110 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade in the summer, and that I would be in Bishop and probably wouldn't be able to get a haircut, a place to stay, or able to get a meal. Too, in those days it was reportedly a sheep-herders' town. So they advised me that I could come home, and if I was willing to go to San Diego, I actually could start packing, and I'd get an authorization the next day to go to San Diego. I agreed to accept a job assigned in San Diego, and then returned to Oakland.

The next day instead of getting an authorization to go to San Diego, I received a statement from the State Personnel

Amerson: Board that I was physically unable to work for the state of California. I was still on vacation leave from having worked for the State Relief Administration, for seven years in fact, and that notice made me a little bit unhappy, putting it mildly.

I went from place to place, trying to argue the case. Finally I decided I was getting nowhere, and I then went to the hospital and retained the services of three specialists. I received in my hot little hands, after some six or seven days in the hospital, a statement to the effect that I was physically able to do practically any kind of work. I went to Sacramento and presented this to the employee who had written the letter of denial from the state personnel office, and he advised me that nothing could be done because the department head wasn't there. I said, "Well, you wrote the letter," and he said, "That makes no difference. I cannot clear you." It was near noontime, and I suggested, "I guess we'd both better go to lunch. I'll be back." He told me there was no need of my coming back because he could not do anything for me, and with that I left.

Fortunately I had made some friends in my lifetime, even some in Sacramento. I went to the home of one, and the office of the other. When I returned at one o'clock, the state personnel office was very glad to see me. They referred me to the Personnel Section of the Employment Service, and there I was authorized to go the next day and report to the Oakland office of the Department of Employment, because I was hired.

Henderson: Why was the state personnel office glad to see you that day. What had come up?

Amerson: As I previously stated, I had two very good friends, and I saw one at his home and the other at his office.

Henderson: Would you like to give their names?

Amerson: I would not.

Henderson: Was there a certain governmental program that was going on that was particularly in search of black employees?

Amerson: In those days? No. In those days I was a first Negro. There was no program, there was no pressure coming from any group. All the pressure that developed had to happen from

Amerson: my shoulders. My shoulders were pretty broad then and I was pretty determined, and it worked.

Henderson: So you just think it was from having connections that you were able to get your job?

Amerson: No, not at all. It wasn't really from that. When we took the state examination for the position, I think some three thousand people in the state took it, and they stated on the announcement at the time of the posting the state was only going to certify 250 people; and incidentally, I came out 102 on the list. There were 148 below me on the list, and 2,750 who took the exam who just did not qualify.

Henderson: Very good!

Amerson: Also, that score was after my oral interview. All I'm trying to say is, that they should have hired me anyway. I had been working for the state of California from 1933 to June of 1941. Remember?

IV CALIFORNIA WAR MANPOWER COMMISSION

Henderson: How did the War Manpower Commission fit under the Employment Service?

Amerson: In 1941, when war was declared, the federal government in December developed plans to take over the entire employment service operation throughout the entire United States, and put it under what was known as the War Manpower Commission. It was on a loan basis, and it was possible to do this because the employment service throughout the nation; administratively, was paid for by the federal government, and is yet. All the staff, all of the furniture, and I've forgotten now what else, comes through federal grant.

Henderson: This was so before the enactment of the Manpower Commission?

Amerson: Yes, and still is. Consequently, they just took us over and we became federal employees, and as I recall it seems to me it was January 1, 1942. We stayed that way until almost five years later. If we had finished out the five years, they'd have had to blanket us in as federal employees. We were released back to the state just before the end of the five years.

Henderson: Was Sam Kagel in the Employment Service prior to the enactment of the Manpower Commission?

Amerson: Frankly, I do not know. I don't remember that because, you see, I had only been in the employment service approximately four months before it was taken over by the federal government.

Henderson: In what way did you come in contact with Sam Kagel?

Amerson: None. I knew him. I went to one or two conferences which included the level in which I was working.

Henderson: At what level were you working?

Amerson: I went in as an interviewer trainee. I worked at that rating until, well, Manpower took us over, and then I became an interviewer I. About six months later, I guess it was, I became a supervisor. It was almost a year after I first started. Later they started using me to do training because in the section that I was supervising, the new people who came in had to be trained in the use of the occupational dictionary and how to interview. The week that I was originally hired, the person who in the area office had been doing the training, had in some manner gotten himself mixed up with some of the unemployment insurance money and was summarily put in jail. There was no training officer, and when I got the assignment as supervisor of the occupational questionnaires section the job was given to me because I had acquainted myself, on my own effort, as to how to handle the occupational dictionary.

I can't remember who the person was from the state office who came down and was making an audit on the work in the office, but anyway, they stopped at my desk and we became talking friends that day, and the next thing I knew, I was being assigned to the area office on call to do training in the occupational dictionary. When they learned I was a former social worker and had social work techniques in interviewing, and my employment interviewing apparently was satisfactory, I also taught classes in interviewing techniques for the Employment Service.

They called me over to the area office from time to time, and later I was called in and put on the training staff of the area office to do training in occupational dictionaries, sections I, II, and IV. Later I taught Employment Service interviewing, and beginning Occupational Analysis.

Henderson: Could you tell me about those conferences that were held?

Amerson: What usually happened was; as the new programs developed, which occasioned the need for changes in policy, changes of procedures, and sometimes actual staff changes; different levels of administration and supervision were called into conference. The occupational questionnaire process was not something that had been operating in the Department of Employment over the years, and there were many changes from day to day, partially also because the forecasts of work load

- Amerson: that had been made were in error. Interviewing processes that had been developed were too lengthy, and many other problem areas developed. Along with the process of the interviewing, and coding, was the necessity of consideration for high priority defense jobs and the process of changing a man from one occupation on which he may be working, over to another occupation which was considered as vital war activity. Oftentimes they would call a conference for a changing of policy, as well as the adaptation of policy in order to get a better understanding between the potential employee, the employers, and the staff.
- Henderson: At what point did the War Manpower Commission decide to lure Negro southerners to the West?
- Amerson: At the same time they decided to lure anybody from the South, the Midwest and anywhere else they could find manpower.
- Henderson: So it wasn't just Negroes?
- Amerson: No, no.
- Henderson: This started when the war started?
- Amerson: They were willing to lure anybody from anywhere that they could. It was not a concentration on just Negro employees. It was a concentration on getting every warm body here to work in the shipyards and other defense employment. In line with that, there were some 500,000 people brought to the Bay Area. It was estimated that in the later part of 1944 there were approximately 75,000 Negroes brought here. So, you see, it was not just a matter of bringing Negro people here. It was a matter of bringing people.
- Henderson: How would you compare the Negro war worker to other war workers?
- Amerson: I would say that they were essentially suffering in the same problem areas. There was inadequate housing. The government built war housing and incidentally, I don't know whether you ever noticed them or not, but out on San Pablo Avenue in Albany, on the lefthand side, there's some of that old war housing that they've kept in good repair, and there's a waiting list right now of University of California students to get in that housing.
- Henderson: Is that Codornices Village?

Amerson: Yes. So, I look at this war housing as not being the worst thing that ever happened. It was just that people who lived in this war housing had never recognized what it meant to keep up the place in which they lived, so they would just beat it up. That's where the problem area was and still is. Too, I think all people had too many other people in a house. I think most all people broke local building codes and restrictions in trying to accommodate the advent of people into the area, and also make money. The reason I say that is I owned a place on 43rd Street in Oakland, near Telegraph Avenue. It was a three bedroom house. Being naive about people, I rented it for a short period of time because I wasn't ready to do what I wanted to do with the house in the way of remodeling. I let some war workers in, and then I couldn't get them out because they had housing restrictions on. One just couldn't put people out of a house in those days, and you couldn't raise the rent.

They took me for a patsy because they were getting from each individual they had in the house (and I think they had three or four other than their family) as much as I was charging the family for the rent. These were whites, and this was in a white neighborhood. When I went in the house after they left, I found they had really given the hardwood floors in two rooms a bad working over. The kitchen looked revolting, and the plumbing in the bathroom was in real bad shape. In fact, the plumbing from the washbasin was so stopped up I had to take a section of the pipe out. It couldn't be forced clear and clean. Finally they left; left me with a fairly well beaten up house. I had personal experience with the problem area.

I'm merely saying that it was a bad scene, bringing in people who had not been exposed to city life; who had not really been exposed to how to really take care of city housing. The prime interest was only to know that they'd have shelter over them and could go to work everyday. I have no reason to believe that one group suffered any more than another group.

Henderson: I was reading just a few pages from The Negro War Worker in San Francisco by Charles Johnson.

Amerson: Yes.

Henderson: What do you suppose prompted Charles Johnson's study?

Amerson: If you have time, I would suggest that you see a Negro Who's Who. The University may have such. Look him up and you'll see what kind of a background that Dr. Johnson has. He was an outstanding sociologist, had worked in various levels; had worked for various foundations; and had performed and surveyed all kinds of social work in all kinds of patterns of life.

He knew, just like you know now and I knew then, that one day the war would end, and he was naturally interested in just what kind of thing was going to happen in an area that had been stated as being invaded by one of the largest mass movements of people in the history of the United States, and what was going to happen to the Negro people. I am sure that's what prompted it.

Henderson: How did you participate in this study?

Amerson: His study had to do with employment, people who were referred to jobs, and where they were referred, and he naturally contacted the War Manpower Commission. They opened the doors for him so that he could go about freely from office to office. When he came to the office where I worked, he asked me questions. I tried to answer them.

Henderson: When you were supervisor of the section on occupational questionnaires, were there Negroes coming in to fill these questionnaires out?

Amerson: No. They didn't file them out, there. They were long forms made out of heavy paper like a file folder without the tab, only longer, and folded in three folds. The person got this form through the mail at home, he filled it all out, folded it up, and mailed it back. It was estimated that Alameda County would get something like 78,000 questionnaires and when the project was over, we had received more than 120,000.

Henderson: You were just trying to build up the manpower?

Amerson: Well, this was the government's way of getting people located onto jobs that were necessary for the war effort. What happened from the questionnaires after we reviewed them: we determined what the man had done as an occupation. If it was an occupation that could be used here in any one of the ship-yards, private industries working on government contracts, and/or governmental establishments, he was interviewed and referred to the place where he could do the job, and we made the clearance ✓

Amerson: so that he could go back to his original job after the war was over. We had some people who came here from Oklahoma, in fact, some of them whom I taught at Langston. We had some people from Texas who had been students when I was at Prairie View. We had others from everywhere, but these happened to be people that I knew, and when the war was over, they went back to their former jobs. Many came from Arkansas, Louisiana; but not so many from Mississippi and Tennessee.

Henderson: I see. Did you do some interviewing of those people at that time?

Amerson: I did a little bit of everything. As a supervisor I was willing, able, and did very well, anything I asked anybody else to do, and incidentally, thereby won respect and full cooperation of the employees assigned to my staff.

Henderson: I read somewhere that the Manpower Commission was demanding more and in need of more black women as workers than men. Is this true?

Amerson: I never heard of it. I heard a lot of things, but never that. There were numbers of women working in war industry though.

(Interview 2, September 15, 1972)

Henderson: Did it seem as though the state was preparing for this takeover by the federal agency when you came in?

Amerson: I was too new to really tell you this, but I would assume they had some idea, because they had been hiring people. There was a civil service list. I took the examination the year before in 1940; and after my oral examination I went inactive on the list because I was still with the State Relief Administration. The Relief Administration shut down in June. And I made myself active on three lists; the first offer came from the Department of Employment because they were hiring.

Henderson: You were on three lists. Would you describe the other two lists?

Amerson: One was the Youth Authority, I believe, the other was social welfare.

Henderson: All three departments were doing some hiring at the time?

Amerson: No, but I never felt that it was wise to wait until you were tired or fired from a job to then try to look for another. So I would take examinations for things I thought I qualified for, and those two I passed. Incidentally, somewhere in the picture I managed to become a registered social worker. That was more the result of an opportune circumstance than anything else. It happened that the Department of Social Welfare and the Bureau of Professional Standards went together and set up a process by which if one had 'X' number of years (I think it was five years) experience as a social worker, he could take the examination as given to University of California one-year graduates in social welfare, and if one passed it, he was registered. And so, I'm a registered social worker.

Henderson: You passed the university test?

Amerson: No. It was a Welfare Department test usually given to the university graduates for registry qualification. I, at that time, felt that it was necessary to get all the equipment that one could get--anything qualifying that was available--and so, I did. I still am paying my dues as a registered social worker in the state of California.

Henderson: Was the questionnaire you used while supervising the section of occupational questionnaire a special one adopted by the Manpower Commission, or had it been used by the Employment Service before?

Amerson: It was adopted as a form of the Manpower Commission, and was mailed to individuals by the, as I recall, draft boards. The federal government mailed them out, and the federal government received them back. They were then referred to us.

Henderson: How did they choose to whom they would send their questionnaires?

Amerson: They sent them to every male over age twenty-one, as I recall. I think they were mailed out on the basis of the draft registration. ✓

Henderson: I remember you said it was a very long questionnaire.

Amerson: I looked for one. I should have one around the house. More than likely I do, but I couldn't find it. Nevertheless, it was quite a thing.

Henderson: Did it include questions about race and religion?

Amerson: Not about religion. I don't know that it had anything on race. It may have.

Henderson: I see. Did this last as long as the war did?

Amerson: Yes.

Henderson: And then it terminated?

Amerson: I am really not sure, I think the answer is, yes.

Henderson: But you felt that that kind of thing led up to the introduction of the FEPC bill?

Amerson: Yes, I would assume that Mr. Hawkins thought there was a need to fill the vacuum that was created when the President's declaration expired. It had left a void--thousands and thousands of Negro people right here in the Bay Area needed jobs. I'm sure that Los Angeles was in the same predicament. They needed jobs, and the answer was to follow up with an FEPC bill in the state; so Mr. Hawkins presented a bill, and worried with it in each session of the legislature for several years, but never could get it through. He didn't have enough legislative support, and then Byron Rumford came along later and presented a bill similar to it. The two of them in the assembly, cooperated strongly and by putting on a lot of pressure, got it passed.

Henderson: Yes, this was in 1959.

Amerson: I think it was around fourteen years in getting that measure passed.

Henderson: Yes, it took California much longer than other states, didn't it?

Amerson: Yes, longer than some other states. California, with all its evidence of freedoms, has been noted for dragging its feet on things like FEPC, fair housing and busing.

Henderson: And women's rights.

Amerson: Less, I think for women.

Henderson: While Roosevelt's special declaration was in effect, though, did industries refuse to hire Negroes?

Amerson: Some of them had to be put on the carpet, yes.

Henderson: Do you remember any of these?

Amerson: Not offhand, no.

Henderson: How did labor unions accept Negroes at that time?

Amerson: Well, that was a very bad, sad affair. The biggest union to be involved was the boilermakers. In the boilermakers union they broke down the trades so that they were able to tell a man "You put this here, and you put that there, and you do this to this," and each man would have one of those job assignments to do. It was broken down so simply in building those ships, until regardless of whether the man arrived with only a name tag on him, and couldn't read his own name; if he didn't do anything except what he was told, he was doing something in order to build that ship.

When the war activity started, the boilermakers union here in Oakland, had a meeting room in which there was a bar. The men would come down and they would have their meetings and after the meetings they would be joined by their wives and other women at the bar. Everything went along quite well, and all of a sudden they looked around and Negroes were coming in. They spoke to two brothers--one of them who was a janitor there--about starting what was known as an auxiliary union. They painted a good and an attractive picture of how these fellows could be the business agent and other office holders of the auxiliary union, even be the secretary to the auxiliary union and be paid a salary. These two brothers began holding meetings down at a little place on Seventh Street, trying to encourage the oldtimers to buy this package.

We heard about it in the Employment Service (Manpower Commission office), and I went down one night. I came back and reported to my supervisor what I had learned. I talked to Ben Watkins because I thought I recalled he had had some interesting union problems. Ben was an orchestra leader in Oakland. He belonged to the musicians auxiliary and told me all about auxiliaries, and about how they were just a unit put off to the side, generally without the full rights or privileges granted to regular union members.

Amerson:

So I explained it to my supervisor. While I was talking about it, a white fellow worker who came into the employment service about the same time I did was listening, and he said he would like to go down and see what it was all about, too. So, the next meeting he and I went. Well, it became necessary to start opposing the operation that night. We put up such a stiff argument the two brothers didn't get an auxiliary started that night. There was another meeting scheduled, and this process went on about three or four weeks. In the meantime the brothers had engaged themselves a lawyer, but we kept on pushing hard, and by about the fourth week, the parent body of the boilermakers became tired of the delay, the delaying tactics were causing, so they rolled in and put pressure on, and after I think it was the fourth meeting we went to work the next morning and an office supervisor called us in and asked us what happened. We told him and he said, "Well, I'll tell you. There's so much heat put on this now by the boilermakers, that I don't think you can win, and if you keep pushing too hard, I don't know whether we can protect you."

The next meeting I told the fellow worker not to go, that I'd take a chance on myself going and see what would happen. I arrived and began fighting right away, and they opened it up for a vote. At this point the Negro lawyer took the floor and talked about the need for the work, and how much the poor Negro needed this employment (as if it depended upon a segregated auxiliary union) and he brought up a story of his grandmother who had been a slave into the picture, and even had tears running down his cheeks. To all of the show, I said, "Oh, nuts." When they took the vote, they squeaked through by a few votes and set up their auxiliary union.

That was not bad enough; you see, there were other things that got in my craw. Another person got into the auxiliary union picture. He set up a club, and all these poor, ignorant people, in a strange place (some of them couldn't read or write their own name) were told they had to go through this club in order to join the auxiliary in order to work at the shipyards. When I found out about that, I did an unethical thing. I had a friend in Washington who was with the War Manpower Commission. I telephoned him and brought in all the pressure of the federal government, and that stopped the club movement right quick! I was so mad I couldn't think straight. This club activity was taking \$7.50 from every person, and all that was given was a sort of printed clearance with their name written on a card. The prospective employee took this

- Amerson: card with his name written on it to one of the brothers who was sitting in an office across the street and the worker was signed into the boilermakers auxiliary as he paid his union fees.
- Henderson: What was this person actually doing? Was he making money for himself?
- Amerson: It is my opinion, yes; and that the three of them were making money for themselves.
- Henderson: And there was a club?
- Amerson: Actually, I doubted then, and yet do not believe these poor people were joining anything.
- Henderson: So this was a Negro group that promoted the auxiliary and the club activity?
- Amerson: Yes, taking advantage of their own people, and I was quite unhappy.
- Henderson: What exactly did the man in the Manpower Commission do to stop the club?
- Amerson: I do not know but soon we could and would not refer to the club. We would only refer to the boilermakers auxiliary. So the process had to stop in which was taken a token from the men who wanted an opportunity to join the boilermakers auxiliary.
- Henderson: I understand even the idea of having auxiliaries was not fully accepted by some Negroes. It was considered a negative thing in some people's eyes.
- Amerson: Yes, it was. Of course I could not see where we had to bow to that kind of a situation.
- Henderson: This is some years later, but around 1949, Augustus Hawkins introduced a bill to the assembly to ban state agencies from including questions about race and religion. Do you remember that? Is there a story behind that you could tell me?
- Amerson: No, not really. I recall his efforts to get such a bill passed, but nothing pertaining to the particulars of his efforts.

- Amerson: During the war, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a fair employment policy. Under that policy we had an opportunity to refer minority people for hire to all job openings. There was a process that was developed whereby you filed a claim if you were refused employment on the basis of race.
- Henderson: These complaints were filed with fair employment practice commission?
- Amerson: No, it was not yet called that. They were filed with the War Manpower Commission and there was a section to investigate and demand compliance with the presidential order.
- Henderson: Would you like to tell me about that Manpower Commission conference held in May 1945 called by Sam Kagel concerning Negro war workers?
- Amerson: There were many conferences. The war began to taper down in the later part of 1944, and layoffs had begun. In '43, I think, Mr. Kagel became the then northern area California director of the War Manpower Commission, and he soon in 1944 began holding conferences for managers and then for supervisors. I was not included in management level. I think I went to either one or two as a supervisor. What was said at the manager's level I'm not too sure except that the general trend of the discussion was that the commission was to be of help to develop thought and program in an effort to lend direction to areas for placement of workers who had become totally involved in the war effort and were scheduled for or had been laid off.

There may not have been any Negroes present on the management level, because there were no Negro office managers, and I do not know whether they included calling in the Urban League and the NAACP or not. I just do not know because I was not there. From those conferences, we did get summaries from the managers who attended the meetings.

Then later, he called a supervisors' conference for the utilization of minority workers released from war industry. This was basically the topic of the conference. I recall Don Glover from the Urban League was there, and I think Mrs. Tarea Pittman was there representing the NAACP. There were one or two other Negroes there. This dealt with what was available within a community that could be advantageously used in the ultimate placement of displaced minority war workers.

Amerson: It was the beginning of what was and is now known as the GED test (as an educational qualifying factor for employment). The test was a general educational examination given generally to returning servicemen who were released here in the area. If they had not finished high school and if they wanted to, they could go directly to the designated school and take the test. Passing of same provided for certification equal to finishing high school. Consideration was given to all war workers as well, who had some high school training but had not graduated; they could do likewise. Then came the matter of what vocational and semi-professional training there was available within the area. In Oakland there was the Laney Trade School at that time and Oakland's board of education agreed to a beefing up of that activity.

There weren't too many other resources to call on, however, the Oakland labor council endeavored to keep its apprenticeship quotas filled. San Francisco had a very good trade school too, but it was on a more technical plane than Laney, and didn't prove to be the kind of facility to which one could refer the marginal workers who made up the majority of the problem area. All of it was an attempt to determine what kind of service training, and jobs could be developed.

The bad thing about most of the conferences; the planning; and the programming; was apparently no one was remembering the Charles Johnson Study and hence the effort wasn't particularly successful. After the war was over and the pressure of the presidential order relaxed, there were some unions and employers who decided they were going to do all they could to drop whatever minority members they had, just as the study predicted. One of the group of skills happened to be the foundry workers. I was hired on a retainer basis by one of the largest foundries in Oakland--General Metals Corporation, a subsidiary of Trans-America--to aid management in making a satisfactory transition from war work to general production, and with their minority workers. The management of that group of foundries decided that the minority workers they received during the war effort had proven to be good workers, and there was no reason to let them go. They retained me, in part, to see that those hired were encouraged to stay; and, if the firm needed additional workers, a representative number of qualified minority workers would be included in the referrals.

Henderson: Did you work out of their office?

- Amerson: Yes, however, I was still an employee for the War Manpower Commission. I took off every Friday afternoon, and oftentimes other afternoons during the week. Much of this time was spent with the men on the foundry floors listening to their problems and conferring with their union agents.
- Henderson: How did you keep the Negro workers on? What did you have to do on this special job?
- Amerson: Principally it was a matter of listening to their problems, some personal, some business, some on the job; and trying to help solve them. In one of the foundries, the foreman for the laborers was a southerner, who felt he had the backing of the union and was causing some problems with the workers. One day, he had become quite rough with the men and I suggested to him to calm down a bit or else it would be his job. He didn't believe me and continued. Very soon thereafter, he had to leave.

We tried to work in advising the Negro worker to learn more and complete skills, for there again they had broken down the job so that it didn't take very much intelligence to perform on the job. What we were trying to do was to encourage the men to learn more of the trade so that they could hold their own with the regular job they would obtain after the war work was through. We also worked very hard and were successful in getting several who qualified for, to take an apprenticeship. We had our problems with workers who on those kind of jobs worked in industry only during the war and decided to move on. Some of them became homesick, had money, and they just wanted to get up and leave, and they did. Then came the problem of finding new help to fit into the open job spots. That, too, was fairly difficult at times.

There were other problems, one had to do with getting the workers to work on time. The union shop stewards were prone to be ready to drop a man who couldn't appear on the job on time, especially a minority person. Perhaps here my bias is showing, because some of them had some bad attendance records. Usually there were standing by, any number of other workers waiting for a job after the war ended. It took a little doing to get some of them there, on the job on time every day. In fact, you asked me the other day about housing. Everybody seemed to be on the make in those war days, and I can remember I went to see about one young fellow who was very conscientious and worked very well with his fellow worker. He did a good job, but he was late almost every other

Amerson: morning--sometimes every morning. One evening after work I went to his address and discovered it was a storefront, where someone had placed two rows of army cots with the heads of each of them against the walls, just like an army barracks. These cots were rented to war workers. There was only one bathroom, and this fellow not too large in size, oftentimes was pushed out of the way, and hence was late frequently.

I returned to the office and talked to my immediate boss about the situation and then he and I went to see the manager and talked the problem over with him. Soon General Metals Corporation installed showers and lockers so that the men could shower before they went to work as well as after they finished their day's work and had a safe place to leave their clothes. Many things can be done with good judgment and some imagination.

Those years, especially after the war ended, provided many opportunities of challenge in the form of placing Negro workers in industry and business unrelated to the war. The first Negro that worked at Milens Jewelry, I referred her there, and I yet have a letter from the company thanking me and stating they were happy with the referral--so pleased in fact that they sent me a very fine pen and pencil set. Job regulations required that I return the set, however.

Henderson: Was the Negro employee a woman or a man?

Amerson: Woman. Incidentally, when I was in the Richmond office, I placed an alteration woman in an establishment on MacDonald Avenue, and the employer was so pleased with her appearance and performance he told her one day, "You know," he said, "you ought to be working where you have more natural light." And he put her in an area near the front window.

During my employment in the San Francisco office the first Negroes employed in Safeway Stores, I negotiated their placement. It was an interesting experience. Don Glover solicited an order for Negro workers for Sears, and he and I recruited and placed the first Negroes to work in Sears Stores. Mr. Glover was with the Urban League; San Francisco office. In the Oakland office soon after the war; the first Negro to drive long haul truck, out of Teamsters Local 70, I made the placement and temporarily had fears of losing my job.

Henderson: Were the teamsters very conservative?

Amerson: At that time many unions discriminated, including the teamsters, and the teamsters were rough in the supporting of their policies and still are.

Henderson: And yet, it's such a large union.

Amerson: Because they are large, they have the muscle. I think that day the building almost shook in anticipation.

Henderson: Did someone in the teamsters call up the manager or someone?

Amerson: No--, but that was just a very interesting day. The union had placed an order for a long-haul driver, and I had not given it much thought, primarily because it was not reasonable to expect there were any unemployed drivers of that type in the area. All such drivers were generally union members and if they needed employment they would "check in" at the union hall before applying to us--hence, we had no such applications on unemployed truck drivers who could handle that job. It was on that day, a young man walked into the office, a Negro I had known for quite some several years before the war started.

We happily greeted each other, and I asked him what he had been doing for the past several years. He replied, "I didn't learn to shoot a gun too well in the Army, so they gave me a job driving one of those big truck and trailer rigs." I said, "No kidding," and then added, "I think I have a job for you, and I'll refer you to it on one condition. You must do exactly as I tell you." There was no doubt in my mind that he could handle the job. When I knew him before the war he had been driving truck and trailer rigs; hauling grain, fruit and agricultural products in and around the Woodland area. I called a friend at the Teamsters' Local, wrote the referral slip, cautioned my job seeker to follow the instructions I had given him to the letter. I even suggested that if he forgot the instructions to get to a telephone and call me back with the idea that if he made a mistake it was quite possible that he and I both could be looking for a job.

Time went by and finally that telephone call: He was hired. Things were fairly edgy for awhile, as we waited for the approval of my referral.

Henderson: Was it unnatural for an employee of the employment service such as yourself to make those kinds of arrangements; or, was that a natural thing?

Amersön: Others did it, many times, asking me for advice. I think they got into the spirit of it. Too, it was soon obvious that more of my fellow workers were sympathetic with my efforts, and the racial problem. My regular job was to make and supervise the making of placements. All through the time that I worked for the employment service after the war was over and until I retired, I oftentimes worked part of my noon hour, sometimes didn't take breaks, sometimes working in the evenings, all in order to take care of these kinds of special referral cases; generally of Negroes for whom I was trying to do something out of the ordinary. This activity took me away from my regular assignments, and on occasion I worked many extra hours in order to keep current with my regular work load.

Frankly, I have some two hundred referral slips of people who were sent to me by some of my friends, and associates, asking, "Can you help this person or that one?" Generally they were registered in the employment service and I most often was able to help. If I couldn't get anything for a person I'd tell them; if I could, I would immediately start the process.

Many people in the Bay Area, have raised families, educated their children, lived in nice homes, and some have even retired; because I was fortunate enough to be in a position to help them--and for that I am very happy about it all. In fact, it was a lot of fun. I guess I should say that I can never make the statement that there was ever a dull moment or that there were not some crazy moments of racial conquest.

In making referrals of this type, the major skill one must be concerned about is the ability to quickly determine what kind of work attitudes, work habits, reliability and personal adjustment abilities the job applicant has. Potential disaster lurks in the making of errors of judgment. Employers and employer representatives oftentimes discuss their recruiting successes and failures over the telephone, at lunch, or even at conferences; and, one's reputation and ability to continue this kind of work many times rests precariously on the rim of a cup of coffee. Every person who needed and wanted work was not suited for every job opening that was on file in the office even though it may have been a beginning job in a particular industry and even though the person applying was of a minority race. Selective placement requires the ability to quickly evaluate people; and in the process of trying to make inroads in industry hiring in those

Amerson: days, one just could not afford to make mistakes. Fortunately, all my life it had been necessary for me to watch people and make my own necessary appraisals and adjustments. As a child at play, I soon learned that the other children did not care to include me in their games if I had to sit down and rest at the wrong time--so, I learned to watch every move, get out of the game at the right time, rest, and go back in; all without anyone being really upset.

The "hard sell" of an applicant because the applicant may be of a minority race, and some times have the basic training can be disastrous. The applicant can so effectively do all the wrong things, 'til the employer gives up in disgust and despair, prejudicially decides all people of that minority group are not qualified; and will spend hours making sure he will not hire another.

Henderson: Are you talking about then or now? You know there is the FEPC now, and an employer cannot refuse to hire.

Amerson: I am talking about then and now. Today, and now an employer can, and many do not hire minority group people; and they stay out of the clutches of the law.

Do you realize that from this office and this old and rather drab desk, I have been making selective placements for the past eight years and such activity has nothing to do with my regular job here. I would say I have made on an average of two placements a month, sometimes more, and at times less; and all of them without benefit of pay, and sometimes without the recipient of the favor having the 'whatever it takes' to say "Thanks." There are yet many employers with no minority persons working for them. Some of these employers have had some bad experiences and sooth their consciences with, "I tried that route once, and boy did I get a 'pip.' Never again." They soon learn there is a way to avoid and evade the FEPC act just as people avoid and evade other laws on the books; and they continue that process until some friend corners them and persuades him to try again and then the friend may call me or someone else they may know who will take the time, put forth the effort and refer a good applicant.

Henderson: You haven't been right on each referral?

Amerson: No, my goodness no. On occasion I have really made a few real "boo-boos." Most of them have been since I left the Employment Service, because here I do not have files of

Amerson: unemployed applicants to choose from. To fill jobs here I've had to contact friends to find applicants, and even 'pirate' applicants from jobs they may be working on elsewhere, that were not as good, or secure, or perhaps did not hold forth the potential of advancement.

Back to your question, I haven't made many mistakes in my evaluation for job referrals from here either. I guess my first reaction was because of memory of one error of judgment that was really bad.

Henderson: Was the person referred a Negro?

Amerson: Yes, but that mattered not, really. The person was educationally qualified, made a good appearance, knew the job; but, was unreliable. There are unreliable people of all races, and if there were green people I am sure some of them would be unreliable. The last job the person had was their only job, and it was not in the Bay Area; hence I could not use the telephone to check the story the applicant gave for leaving said employment. Anyway, I referred, and the applicant was hired and for a few weeks was a most satisfactory employee; then, everything just sort of blew up.

Back to that employer; though he and I greet and talk to each other on occasion, I have a hunch he will never try to conform to FEPC, but you, I, and no one else will be able to prove it. He is very friendly to me, but also disarming. Each time we meet for any length of time he in some manner refers to how he wishes our efforts had worked out, and for some reason I believe him, but I also believe it will be many a long and cold winter before he tries that again. Some day he may call me again for help or some day when we chance to see each other, he just may fool me by telling me who he hired. I hope so, I hope he does. I think I know what his thoughts are. He is a relatively small businessman, and I'll wager he will say, "I'm in business to make money, not to experiment with and solve problems of race relations. I'm one of the little business guys and if I fool around much, I'll go broke. Amerson, you understand what I'm saying, I just can't take chances. Someday maybe we'll try again," and I hope and trust he will. When and if he does, I also hope that the labor market is made up of considerably more trained minority group workers, and such a referral does not hang precariously on the success of a choice from a group of one applicant, the placement person has telephoned all over the Bay Area trying to find.

Henderson: Were there racial reactions against you?

Amerson: Sometimes I thought there were, other instances they were just broad person to person inequities.

Incidentally, one day soon after the war started, I saw a manager take a position rating away from a worker who was white, and give it to another person who incidentally operated in the same social strata with them. If that had happened to me, I'd have considered it happened because I was a Negro and I would have yelled "racial discrimination!" loud and long, and all the way to Washington, D.C. It couldn't have been racial discrimination that was being exercised in that case, it was just plain high level unfairness.

What I'm really saying is, I learned on that day, that everything that happens to me or to any individual is not always racial discrimination. Sometimes there are other kinds of prejudices, and this happened to be a person who was a recipient of this kind of a reaction. No, it wasn't right, but, it was not racial discrimination.

That incident had some interesting effects on me because it made me do some careful looking at my own weights and measures by which I determined that I was being discriminated against. Many years before, I had developed a process of evaluating myself, thanks to my father. When problems would arise, great or small, I usually would use the process in making my decisions. During these times I would take a sheet of paper, draw a line down the center and try to honestly set forth my pluses on one side or half of the sheet and my minuses on the other half. And then grade my pluses by using E, G, F and P for excellent, good, fair and poor. If my minuses outweighed my pluses then I knew I had some work to do on Wayne Amerson, or even if the minuses were fewer or less in percentage but were in important areas, I still knew I had to do something about it. The real challenge in this type of process, is being honest with one's self. It takes a little doing to say to yourself you are not the epitome of kindness, goodness, understanding and ability. That your work habits are poor, that you look very unprofessional in dress, that you have no speech control, that you are semi-dependable on your job, that you are always trying to do as little of your job as you can while others have to carry some of your work load. And then you come up with perhaps why other workers and/or people do not like you, and why some go out of their way to avoid you, or put the pressure on.

Amerson:

That same evaluation process I used when I felt I had been wronged and should do battle. There is little need of taking on a battle unless one knows three things:

1. What are you fighting for? Is it worth the struggle?
2. Who are you fighting?
3. Do you have a chance to win?

If I didn't know all those answers and if my minuses outweighed my pluses, then no battle--maybe another day at another time and perhaps for another cause.

In all of this process, honesty with one's self is the key. Many times I've listened to employees going into a long discourse of comparing themselves with other employees to prove discrimination, but though no employee should be negligent about their work performance, the complaining employee should remember they were hired to do a job, and to do it correctly, and on time. Though areas of human frailties may influence supervision to show favoritism, the complaining worker yet had the basic responsibilities of performing the job and without benefit of error, as well as being reasonably affable to all. The salary being paid is paid for those factors of performance. When managerial and supervisory reactions prove to be unjust in spite of an honest, just and satisfactory evaluation, at that time the judgment of discrimination may be in order.

It was fairly easy for any worker to evaluate their performance in the Employment Service. Standards had been established for the performance of practically every operation. It was a known fact that an application should be completed in so many minutes. Some applications took longer, some took less time; but the average time element was a known factor, as was the time to pay continued claims. There were levels of performance or percentages used as to how many referrals to make a certain percentage of hires by the employers; and on and on these measurements went. To maintain them, one had to know their job but generally I doubt that the department demonstrated much favoritism or discrimination in the lower levels of operation. In the higher levels of management, there has been and perhaps always will be a high level of favoritism shown against many, and it is not limited to racial favoritism or lack of it.

Amerson:

Incidentally, are you sure you really know when you are discriminated against? As a second thought, when you think you are, are you sure you can prove it? Can you honestly and fairly remove all other areas of cause for treatment received before making that claim? If the answer to any one of these questions is "no" then with malice toward no one--just get busy improving number ONE.

I might add that interesting things happened in the Employment Service, after the war was over. All the employees had to take state examinations to validate the positions representing promotions and/or hirings that we had received during the war, because such ratings and appointments were given under the federal system. They announced and did give a series of examinations. I had quite a battle with that. I came to the Employment Service in August, and War Manpower took us over in the following January. Under the state service six months was the probationary period. They notified me that I had six weeks to make up on my probationary period. I don't know the exact dates now, but I had approximately six weeks. They notified me I'd have to take my lower rating and work in it for the six weeks in order that I could take this examination series, which I did. I understood this, it was in the manual and it was all regular.

When I finished the six week period I then received another notice, that I could not take the examination because I still owed two months, and there was not enough time to complete the two months before the examination. I wrote back trying to find out how the two months were involved, and I found out that the manager had delayed sending in my hiring papers for two months, and had held them on the desk. I applied for a hearing to the personnel board and went before them to plead my case. In so doing, I had set up three folders all alike, with all the evidence that I had, and gave one to the secretary of the board, one to the chairman of the board, and I kept the other. I still have it.

In the first hearing, they made no decision. I went before them again, and they continued to delay. In the process, because I had presented my facts in such a well organized manner, I had developed a friendship with one of the members on the board and he began trying to help. Despite his trying, the board wouldn't make a decision for some reason unknown to me. Finally the day before the examination he called me again: "Wayne?" I said, "Yes?"

Amerson:

"You are going to take the examination tomorrow?" I replied, "No, I don't think I'm going to take the examination. I don't have an authorization yet, and I'm not going to go over to San Francisco and be there without an authorization to take the series. That is one thing they're not going to get me to do; go over there and make myself look stupid." "Oh," he said, "there will be an authorization there."

"I don't know anything about that," I replied. It isn't here." This exchange went on a couple of times, and finally I said, "Well, Mr. ----, I've got something to tell you, and you'd better be sitting down." He said, "What?" I said, "You'd better be sure you're sitting down--in a chair with arms on it. I have something to tell you." He asked, "What are you talking about?" I said, "I want to tell you, there will be no examinations tomorrow." He said, "Are you out of your mind?" I said, "No, I am not out of my mind. There will just not be any examinations tomorrow."

"Do you realize what you're saying?", he queried.

"Yes, I realize exactly what I'm saying. I have a lawyer and I have a judge, and I'm filing an injunction against the entire examination process in the entire state. Nobody will take any examinations tomorrow, and I hope the state of California has a whole lot of money, because they're going to have to send a telegram to everyone in the state scheduled for that examination process, because there just won't be any." He replied, "You can't do that!" I said, "Don't tell me I can't do that! I have a lawyer, and I have a judge who tell me I can."

Well, he sat there--"You can't do that!" I said, "I can do that. I know I can, and what is more, I'm going to." He said, "I'll call you back. I'll call you back in a half hour!" In about forty-five minutes he called me back, and said, "You know, Wayne, I wouldn't do that if I were you." I said, "What's the matter, Mr. ----?" I then asked, "Did the attorney general tell you I could do it?" He never did answer that question.

"You should take the examinations, you can pass them." I replied, "How can I pass an examination series when everybody else has been studying and I've been battling you folks?" I added, "There's no use in me taking the examinations anyway, I haven't been studying--everybody else has been studying." To which he said, "Well, you can pass any examination

Amerson: they give." I said, "I'm not Houdini, and neither am I a genius. I'm just not that good. Everyone else has been studying. I've been fighting the personnel board, remember?" He said, "Well, if I were you, I'd take the examinations." I replied, "Well, I don't think I am going to take them," to which he said, "I wouldn't do that if I were you, you won't have a friend in the world." My reply to that was, "Are you telling me you won't be my friend anymore?" and that caught him off guard. He began stuttering and sputtering, and finally I tried to nicely say, "You know you've had a rather rough day and so have I, so I guess there just isn't anymore to it. If you don't mind you may hang up, you called me."

The next morning at six o'clock the phone rang. "Wayne, I hope you've changed your mind." I said, "Why would I change my mind?" "Well," he said, "There's an authorization waiting for you there, right now." I said, "Where is it waiting?" He said, "It's waiting in the examination room." I said, "I couldn't take an examination. Everybody else has been studying!"

By that time it had gotten kind of funny, and I said, "Well, I'll think about it," and I went over there and took the examination series and passed four of the grades of supervisor. If I hadn't pushed him hard, I don't know whether I would have gotten the permission to take the series.

Henderson: Do you think you'd have gone through with the injunction?

Amerson: I would have, yes, if I hadn't been sure of myself (I knew I could pass the examination series, at least two of them). But yes if I thought I couldn't pass them, I'd have gone through with the injunction. Somehow I felt assured the authorization would be there when he told me it would on the previous day, and I had telephoned the lawyer about the conversational exchange. He agreed because he too knew my friend on the board.

Henderson: How much disturbance do you think this caused in the minds of other workers and state employees?

Amerson: I don't know because, frankly, very few people knew about it. I had a habit of not telling people of any of my problems, especially if I didn't think they could help, therefore, very few people knew--very few people.

Henderson: That was a good idea for another reason: this Mr. Whoever couldn't rely on any outside pressure on you.

Amerson: No, I don't think he would do anything like that anyway. You must remember, he began to try to aid me and my problem on his own decision. Incidentally later on, my brother needed some advice and I sent him to Mr.----- with a note. After he read the note, "Oh!" he said, "you're Wayne's brother!" My brother said, "Yes," to which he replied, "You've got a smart brother!" As time went by he continued to be a real good friend.

Technically I don't think the board was prejudiced. I think that the board was hung up on the fact that my authorization of hire had not been signed in due time, and of course I challenged the board the last time I was there by telling them, "I chance to know that if I had been that negligent on my job I'd have been fired. Now what are you going to do about the office manager?"

Henderson: Did you talk to that office manager?

Amerson: No, why should I? The manager was not going to admit to me, oversight or negligence on the job, nor was the manager going to say anything which may suggest a prejudice.

Henderson: You did speak to the manager?

Amerson: Not about that.

Henderson: Is there anything else about the State Employment Service?

Amerson: During the occupation questionnaire problem an interesting time was had by all, because one day as those things were coming in in bigger bunches than we were told we were going to receive them, I realized I needed more staff. I think I had a staff of twenty-three people I was supervising, and I went in and indicated I needed more help. At the time I had two phones on the desk, but in place of additional staff a third phone was installed on the desk. Again I made one of the longest calls I have ever made in my life. I called Washington, D.C. again, and the next day all the phones were removed from my desk. A clerk was assigned to answer my telephone, and I received more help.

Incidentally I didn't always work in the Employment Service. Later on and after the war they combined the

Amerson: Employment Service with the unemployment insurance division again. All the employees basically were required to go through the various sections of the unemployment insurance division because under law they were a combined operation. The unemployment insurance people in turn had to go through the employment service process, so I supervised claims, determinations, the preparing of appeals, and the cash cage. In time I also later became the assistant to the manager. I've had a varied career in the Employment Service and I knew the entire process fairly well.

V SUPERVISION OF PLACEMENT

Henderson: About promotions in the State Employment Service, did you receive very many of them?

Amerson: Two.

Henderson: Did you have an opportunity for more than that?

Amerson: Well, it depends on what you call opportunity because in the first place, when I started in in the Employment Service, I started in at the lowest rate, and then before too long, the war started and promotions were by appointment. I was promoted to what was called the journeyman rate. That was almost four months or four months and a half when I got the journeyman rate, and then I would judge about five or six months later I became a supervisor. After the war was over they gave a series of examinations in which they had to validate the ratings one received during the war. I carried a supervisor II rating until I retired. I retired on my own the first minute I could get out. In the very early fifties I decided that I was not going to take any additional examinations. I was going through some rather harrowing experiences with illnesses of my parents, and I just felt that I just wanted to get out.

Henderson: So you didn't try for a higher management position?

Amerson: Yes, a couple of times only.

Henderson: Did not being a veteran have anything to do with it?

Amerson: Yes. After the validating examinations following World War II, there was a series of examinations approximately in about two years. I took the series and passed them for the next two higher grades, and possibly the next three higher grades, I'm not sure. I have found the cards indicating that I'd passed at least the two higher grades. On receiving the final scores

Amerson: we were comparing them in the office, for the next higher grade. I determined that the points preference given to veterans was almost too much for me to be fighting. One person who was a good friend of mine took the same examination and although he had a lower score, his veteran points preference put him higher on the list by twenty-four positions. During the period of time of the validity of that examination list, they didn't call twenty-four people for that position level. I took one other series after that, and then decided not to take anymore. I didn't think that it was an impossible thing, but I had other things that I wanted to do in the community, other areas in which I wanted to be active, and I didn't want to give my entire life over to the department of employment.

Henderson: While you were supervisor, how did you deal with prejudices that must have come up in the office among your staff?

Amerson: I considered that if I stated my position, the employee then knew, and had been forewarned, hence from then on we would go by the book. The department had a slogan of "Courtesy and Service," and I understood it meant for all people who came in, so I developed a process of talking to each new employee assigned to me.

With care I removed everything from the top of my desk except the manual and the "In" basket. From the manual I would read the line which referred to the responsibility of each employee to render Service to the public with Courtesy. From then on my discourse was fairly well as follows:

"I know that you, even as I, may have some rather adverse reactions to some people--they may even border on being prejudices. I know, for I too have some; I think everyone has some. I trust I have mine under total and absolute control. The 'book,' the manual requires that we, you and I, perform our job each day; with a high level of accuracy, and that we exercise courtesy to all without the benefit of our prejudices showing while we are on the job. Both of these requirements can prove to be most difficult. On the first requirement I trust you will study to learn the processes of operation well. As to the next requirement, that of courtesy, I am aware that some persons may experience extreme difficulty in exercising the needed controls, for I know everyone has areas of prejudice. Even as suggested, I too have some. Because of that fact, again I am here and ready to try to aid you with them. On the other hand, I have

- Amerson: a small suggestion. In this bottom desk drawer there are some several small, brown paper bags. As you arrive each morning stop by the desk take one of the bags and put your prejudices in it, close the bag and hang it with your prejudices up over the door. Just leave them there for the day, and at night you can take them home, bag and all. At home you can do anything you wish with your prejudices; but during the day, be sure to put them up over the door in a bag. I trust you understand what I am saying; for if you permit your personal prejudices to get in the way of you doing your job with courtesy, you will be fired. I will by this same manual see that your services are no longer needed."
- Henderson: Were there many bags above the doors over the years?
- Amerson: No bag ever got over the door. One came near getting up there--should have been up there. But, after giving it some thought I relented and realized that this person was going through some of the tensions that I had gone through with my parents, and I decided to handle it in another manner, and today that person considers himself as a good friend of mine.
- Henderson: Is the person black or white?
- Amerson: White.
- Henderson: Much of your tenure with the Department of Employment appears to have been as a supervisor. Were there periods of time when there were challenges, developing from contacts with the public or your staff?
- Amerson: The answer to that is yes; however, generally, the process of each day were very much the same, the flow of work was constant, and only the human element of seeing different people with their many differing problems and areas of stress provided newness for each day's work and on occasion, its new challenges. Frustration on the part of the worker usually came when the worker saw broad areas of deficiencies, and for them there was no established policy permitting potential corrective measures. Incidentally, as an example; such was my position as I periodically reviewed the continued claims processes, for the Unemployment Insurance Division, and noted the significant number of claims to which the claimant affixed an (X) because he or she could not write their own name. Noting the addresses on such claims, it was a fair guess that the majority of these claimants were Negroes.

Amerson: Though I drew all kinds of mental pictures, I just could not envision how a person could actually survive without the abilities to read and to write. Every thought of a remedy, any kind of remedy, projected by me; involved my being at odds with the Manual of Operations.

One morning, however, I resolved that someone had to do something--and--I was the only one in a position to, and who would do it. That day I advised each employee working at the counter to refer each and every claimant to my desk to see me if such person could not sign their name. Not only were the majority of these claimants Negroes, approximately ninety percent were. I scarcely finished one before there was another one waiting, and to each my story was fairly well the same, "Will you have a seat, please? Your name is Mr. or Mrs. ----? Incidentally, how long have you lived in California?" Invariably, the answer was, "Oh, I came in World War II"; and rapid elementary arithmetic told me they had been residents of the area from ten to fifteen years. I'd ask what they had been doing, and, "How are you getting along"; to which they usually replied, "Oh I've been jobbing around and getting along pretty good."

From out of the blue (the utter and dense fog of confusion in my head) came the half statement, half question, "They tell me you can't sign your name?" and their reply (which I expected), "No, I jess can't write. I never had a chance," did astounding things to my blood pressure. With all calm I could recover, I replied, "You know, you have been in and around Oakland and Berkeley for (the X) number of years, and you are telling me you cannot sign your name and that, you never had a chance?"

Usually there was a replying agreement to that half statement, half question of mine, "No, I jess didn't have no chance for schooling." To which, very carefully, I suggested, "In California there are day schools; there are afternoon schools; there are evening schools; there are all kinds of schools; including Sunday schools; and they are all free, and, you are telling me you can't sign your name? Now, I want you to watch me very carefully. Today, I'm making a place here for you to make an 'X', and then I will sign my name, so that you can get your money, and go spend it as you wish. Next week, do not go to the counter. Just come back to my desk, and we will do this all over again. The week after that you should be able to sign your name, and, if you

Amerson: cannot sign your name--do not come in; you will not get a payment. Remember, you have two weeks to learn to sign your name."

Every time I think of the chances I was taking then, I yet shudder; but it worked.

Henderson: I'm sure you knew when to use that routine and when not to.

Amerson: There was no "when" to use that process. It was a deliberate irregular action on my part, but, I produced a compulsion which urged those claimants to learn to read and write. The reward for such action on my part I am yet reaping. Many days as I am in the streets of the East Bay, someone comes up, with, "Say, I remember you. You made me learn to read and write. Where have you been? I sure miss you down there."

There were other instances, many instances, but none in which I was forced to be at odds with the regulations again. The fact is, it is seldom one has the opportunity to weigh his personal actions against long range social or educational advantages to a segment of society; even though the personal results could be disastrous. I've been retired over twelve years, and appreciative and friendly greetings still come.

Henderson: Would you do the same thing again? Or perhaps today?

Amerson: Under the same circumstances and at the same time, yes. Today, no.

Henderson: Why not today?

Amerson: This is a long story, but I'll try to sum it up in, "I don't know enough. Today everyone knows everything; much, much more than I."

Henderson: You have to be joking. You know that's not so.

Amerson: Oh, yes; yes; it is just as I'm telling you. In fact, I've had a young person come in to this office, look at the material on the table in the lobby and ask a question or two; and then,-- then, tell me I didn't know what I was doing. I thanked him and then realized that really the only one thing I actually know, was, "I was sure paying a heap of taxes for him to supposedly being in attendance and getting an education in, I presumed, Castlemont High School."

Amerson: Incidentally, if you don't mind, soon I'm going to have to make a telephone call to an aging lady who is over ninety, and in a rest home. I first met her many years ago in San Francisco at the American Friends Service Committee headquarters when a few of us were trying to develop an organization which eventually became the Council for Civic Unity.

Henderson: You say she's in her nineties?

Amerson: Yes, and her mind is sharper than a whistle. She is really a wonderful person, and over the years has been strongly involved in the life and program of Fellowship Church as well as other groups which directed their efforts to bringing about better living conditions for, and understanding with, the many in-migrants to the area. You know? There were many individuals who were interested in and concerned about the problems of the area in those days and one has but to pause to realize just how many, and really how much so many, considered improbably, persons have joined hands and energies to aid in the correcting of inequities. My supervisor was aware of my then involvements in community action and at times made suggestions and on occasion introduced me to employers and their personnel managers.

It was in this way I met the personnel manager of the Oakland-Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Office, the Alameda (I believe Todd) Shipyard personnel staff; and in each, along with the Alameda Employment Office I was scheduled to speak and answer questions. I am sure these contacts eased the impact of the President's non-discriminatory hiring directive; as well as did the efforts of the Urban League and the pressures of the NAACP.

One morning I asked one of my supervisors, "How would you like to have Dr. Howard Thurman here to speak to the staff?" The suggestion sort of stunned him, and he queried, "Oh?" I said, "Yes." "Can you get him?" And again, I replied, "Yes." "Get him in the office, here?--Sure, see, what dates we can get him. Where is he," he asked; and then continued, "Phone him and make the arrangements."

I made the contact, cleared the arrangements, went to San Francisco, picked up Dr. Thurman, and drove back to the office. He spoke to the group for about a half hour, and answered a few questions, left; and came back and did the same thing all over again on another day. The assistant to the manager for a long time bragged of having Dr. Thurman

Amerson: in the office. It leveled off a lot of thinking. Those kinds of things worked very favorably in those days, for those were times when the urgencies of what to do with and for the discharged war workers were also becoming frustrating.

Not too many months later I received an appointment to the Richmond office, as the supervisor of placement for that office. It was the result of the validating examination series I took after the lengthy hassle with the personnel board. The telephone call telling me of the appointment was the first announcement notice received in the area and this same assistant to the manager was the first to my desk, grasping my hand, pumping it, and saying, "Congratulations," all at the same time. He also said, "Sit down, maybe I can be of some help." I sat down, as he reached into his pocket and continued, "Listen; you're going to Richmond? If by chance you get into any kind of trouble over there (and he began writing on his personal card), don't say anything to anyone, just get to a telephone and call me." He wrote the address, telephone number of his home, and his sister's home and telephone number, and then said, "If I'm not there, my wife should be. If she isn't there, call my sister. They'll get me. Don't say anything to anyone; first call me." He was raised, and for a long time had lived in Contra Costa County; and had considerable influence in Richmond and the county. I never needed it, but that's the kind of relationship that had developed over the years.

Henderson: At the time you had Howard Thurman come to the office, were you a member of Fellowship Church?

Amerson: Oh, yes.

Henderson: Around what year was that?

Amerson: That was in '45 I believe; perhaps '44, but I think 1945. It was before the war ended, but veterans had begun to return from their tours of duty. Incidentally, Dr. Thurman brought some of his books with him and some of the staff bought copies. Several of the staff occasionally visited Fellowship Church as the result of those staff meetings.

Henderson: What were some of your first impressions of Howard Thurman?

- Amerson: I can't remember that far back. I first met Dr. Thurman in Tuscon, Arizona, when I was enrolled in the university there. He had been to the coast for a lecture series, and was on his way home. He stayed at the residence of the president of the university, and the president and his wife had a dinner for him; including as guests all the Negro students enrolled in the university as well as others, including members of the faculty. It was rather a large group, and the some seventeen or eighteen Negro students considered it a very favorable event in the life of the university.
- Henderson: You were a graduate student at Arizona?
- Amerson: Yes.
- Henderson: I knew you had gone there, but I forgot when.
- Amerson: I first enrolled in January of 1928. I left temporarily because of illness in October, then to return in January of 1929. Back to your question, I think my reactions then were that Dr. Thurman was a person who had a tremendous amount of ability and would stay at the peak of his profession.
- Henderson: And I believe you told me you are still a member of Fellowship Church?
- Amerson: Yes, in fact, I just resigned from the board a few months ago. I've been on the board for many years, and have been chairman of the board for several years. I decided I had best resign, because it's a long way from Vallejo to the church, especially at night. I'm not as young as I once was, and too, the doctor has told me about this running around in the middle of the night.
- Henderson: Is Dr. Thurman still an active minister at the church?
- Amerson: No, he is, as he calls himself, a bench member. We consider and list him as 'Minister Emeritus.' He is retired, and the Thurmans live in San Francisco. He is writing continuously as well as giving guidance to an educational trust fund. He also is willing and does preach at the church on occasion, and the church enjoys the able assistance and enthusiasm of his talented wife.
- Henderson: San Francisco is said to have perhaps had the highest rate of black juvenile delinquents at the time the Fellowship

Henderson: Church was getting started. Do you know what the church was trying to do about this problem?

Amerson: I have extreme doubt that San Francisco's juvenile delinquency problem was anywhere in relation to what it is now. Too, I'm of the opinion it as a problem was peaking, quite some several years after the church started; in fact perhaps in the middle fifties. The church didn't do very much of anything, but one of its members, Orville Luster, who incidentally was one of those I sent to become one of the first employees for Safeway Stores, had recently finished college; went to Log Cabin Ranch where he was a probation officer for the city of San Francisco; and then came back to become the director of Youth for Service. Later, I went to the organization's headquarters and organized the office for him, and Youth for Service has been working constructively with the delinquent youth in San Francisco ever since. Incidentally, Youth for Service was totally integrated; even the delinquent young people were of all races.

Henderson: And this was back in the forties?

Amerson: No, it was the late fifties and early sixties.

William Byron Rumford

Henderson: About the same time that you began working for the state, Byron Rumford was also trying to get a job with the state. When did you come to know him?

Amerson: I knew him before the forties, and he started not with the state, he started with the county. He started at Highland Hospital in I think 1934 or 1935. At that time I did not know Byron. It was not until I came to the Oakland office of the State Relief Administration that I met him. We both were kind of by ourselves in what might be considered as pioneering and had some interesting situations--each of us. We would see each other quite often; when he was putting up prescriptions for his employer at night; and compare notes, usually considering our impact on a needy segment of the public.

I think that perhaps my situation was less critical than his may have been, because I was working with people who,

- Amerson: because of their titles of social workers, considered themselves bordering on the edge of what is now known as a liberal.
- Henderson: When he decided to run for the Seventeenth District, did you have any talks with him?
- Amerson: Yes, from time to time we talked about it. Perhaps generally on two different levels. One of them was, what were the potentials of winning; and second, from what platform could someone run on and expect to win? Prior to his running for office, in fact, a year before he ran for office, I believe attorney Thomas Berkley ran for the city council and lost. We had the advantage of seeing where the strong districts were insofar as votes for a Negro competitor in the Oakland political area. We had determined that the city council was not the level in which one could run and expect to win. We had grave doubts that the supervisorial district was a district in which a Negro could win, but because of the fact that there had been a very strong movement in Berkeley known as the Berkeley Interracial Committee, representing some seven hundred persons, in which Byron had been very active, and at one time had been its president; along with people that he associated with in various social activities, and his knowledge of west Oakland and Berkeley; we reasoned that the assembly seat was the office he would have the best chance of winning.
- Henderson: By this time you'd moved to Oakland?
- Amerson: By that time, yes, I was living in Oakland; in fact I moved to Oakland in 1936.
- Henderson: And, you were a member of the Berkeley Interracial Committee?
- Amerson: I was a member of the Berkeley Interracial Committee, and vice president while Byron was president. It was quite a grouping that came together of the townspeople in Berkeley and north Oakland. The majority of them were white, a representative number from the university campus, principally professors and instructors, and many other people of Berkeley, some of whom were business and professional people. It was a good cross-section of the Berkeley population, and they were quite interested in the racial problems of the city; in fact, they picketed a couple of stores and were able to get Negro employees in them. As time went on it sort of fell apart.

Henderson: Was it this committee that was the main force behind Byron Rumford's candidacy?

Amerson: No, I wouldn't say that that committee was the main force. I would say that it was pretty much a community action. It brought together the Negro people of west and north Oakland, together with those who were residents in west and south Berkeley. There were, however, some segments of the Inter-racial Committee coming together and canvassing strongly the areas known as the hill areas of Berkeley for Byron.

Henderson: Did you attend the citizen's committee that endorsed Byron Rumford?

Amerson: No; remember I was hatched.

Henderson: You were hatched but couldn't you attend community meetings?

Amerson: In those days there was no liberal interpretation of being "hatched." In those days there were all kinds of pressures, and it wasn't always the safest thing to be labeled as an active participant in politics. I attended community meetings but considered it inadvisable to attend political community meetings.

Henderson: That must have been a notable meeting.

Amerson: Oh, it was an interesting meeting. I knew about it, and Byron knew that he had my good wishes, and I did donate to his campaign.

Henderson: Wasn't it decided that whatever candidate was endorsed, all the other aspiring should drop out? And yet, that didn't happen, because there were other blacks filing for the same seat that Rumford was running for. That's really too bad, isn't it?

Amerson: Yes, it is too bad, but it still goes on. In fact, just a few years ago we had a repeat instance when we had a supervisorial seat that was available. Immediately three Negro Democrats filed for that seat; and later the person who now holds the seat informed them that if they could decide on but one candidate, he would not run, and would lend all of his support and all of his efforts to see that that one person would be elected, if possible. The three candidates went home, looked in the mirror, and I presume must have said,

Amerson: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the greatest of us all?"; and each one said, "I am."; and each one continued to run. The person who now holds the seat, stayed in the race and did win.

Henderson: I have the suspicion that Rumford was not a popular candidate in 1948 even though he was endorsed. There was a lot of opposition to him at that earlier stage.

Amerson: Well, yes, there were people who had, for one reason or another, developed images of themselves as potentially strong candidates. Too, it's very hard to discourage anyone who has that kind of an impression of themselves that they should not run. In fact, it's nigh on to impossible. Also we must remember, each of them had some loyal followers. Byron however was a popular candidate--he won.

Henderson: You think of it as an ego problem?

Amerson: Partially, yes, I think so. However, I think that in that particular instance, the choice doubtlessly was the best over the years.

As I look back on the whole scene, and the people who were anxious to run, I dare say that very few if any one of them would have committed themselves to the kind of regimenting type of schedule that Byron kept; in the maintaining of a home, and a business; in being active in various and sundry organizations; and beyond that, realizing that the education which he had was not enough, and then returning to the university and receiving a bachelor's degree and later a master's degree in political science; thus making himself fully equipped for the office he was holding. I just have my doubts that any one of the others would have projected themselves as strenuously in the serving of the people of the community that they represented, or the state of their citizenship. Truly, Byron did serve the state and its people well.

Henderson: How did you contribute to his work in FEPC and getting a bill passed in the assembly?

Amerson: Frankly, I didn't have too much to do with the FEPC bill. I talked about its need both to staff members where I was working, and at other organizations, and emphasized the need of each of them trying to bring to bear as much pressure as

Amerson: they could on their own individual representatives. Beyond that, I didn't know very much I could do. Involvement at that level and at that time was beginning to have its problems. Peoples' attitudes were beginning to change. I seemed to sense I had more challenges of trying to figure out how to get me off my job by Negro people than I had by whites.

Henderson: That's not unusual.

Amerson: In fact, one person became so angry one day, he went to see Byron and ended up telling Byron what he felt was wrong with my approach to his problem, and Byron told him. "Now, listen, you're trying to get unemployment insurance and that man is trying to tell you what the law is. The best thing you can do is go back down there, apologize to him, listen to what he has to say, and go exactly by everything he tells you. That is a sure way to keep you out of trouble. I don't know the law, but he does. I do know that on occasion they take care of people they catch by that unemployment insurance law. I don't know what's on your record, Mr. Amerson does. If I were you, I'd go back down there and listen, and I'm sure that what he's trying to tell you will keep you out of trouble." The man came back, apologized and told me he'd been to see Mr. Rumford. He told me every word Byron had told him, and he left satisfied, and apparently happy.

Henderson: How did the people you spoke to, in a casual way about FEPC, generally seem to respond to the FEPC initiative that was placed on the ballot in 1946?

Amerson: I assume you are referring to employers and their representatives. Many of them had been here in World War II and they had been working under President Roosevelt's declaration regarding fair practices. Those with whom I worked generally were not pushed out of shape about it.

Henderson: That bill was said to be very radical by a very high up person. Was it talked about at that time as a radical bill?

Amerson: With the persons with whom I worked the answer to that was, how radical was it when the president of the United States ordered it by declaration? It worked then; hence, why and how could it be considered radical some several years after the war was over?

Henderson: Oh, it was no more radical than that.

Amerson: No, you'd be handling it by either the declaration or by a law. To the extent of it being administered, that may be something else, but at least it would be handled by either one. The idea was, perhaps people needed to realize we were living in a time when some changes needed to be made. What were we going to do with people who couldn't get a chance to work? The climate wasn't too bad in the Department of Employment. There were a few die-hards, but some of those can be found even today, in every area and level of employment. The climate wasn't too bad in many areas in and around Oakland and Berkeley.

During that period of time I had many speaking engagements. In fact, I had a series of lectures with one of the professors at Mills College, the late Dr. Hedley, and my two topics were housing and employment. I've forgotten the topics that he had, but he had two. I was looking at some of my old notes not too long ago, and some of the things I predicted about housing are now coming true. And the problem area so far as employment, I think, has been leveled off by the fact that we did have an FEPC, and the fact that we did have, at one time, some very conscientious and knowledgeable people in the Department of Employment. They had the respect of the community and were able to refer minority people on jobs where they had never been before.

Henderson: Did you know of any efforts that the governor, Earl Warren, was making at that time for FEPC?

Amerson: No. I may have, then. Today I do not recall.

Henderson: So you were unaware that he introduced a bill in 1946?

Amerson: Yes. I may have known then; however, I would not have been surprised then or now.

Henderson: Many black people didn't pay much attention to what he was doing.

Amerson: I knew that Mr. Hawkins had introduced a bill and there had been quite a struggle to get something done about it at the time, and it died. He fought valiantly for renewal of this bill. It just didn't seem that the people who were representing us in Sacramento could get it up off the ground. For some reason they couldn't put the correct combination together so that it would pass. After Byron had been in Sacramento a while; he too began to make friends. Then, he

Amerson: and Mr. Hawkins, both, had friends, some separately and some collectively, and they were then able to cooperate on such a bill and successfully get it through. Incidentally, our futures as Negroes had, in many instances, been significantly influenced by the abilities of our leadership, great and small, being able to make good and solid friends among the so-called white race.

VI HOUSING

Henderson: You mentioned earlier that at a lecture series at Mills College you made predictions about housing. Do you want to go into housing now, and any work that you might have done in that area?

Housing in the Bay Area

Amerson: Housing has always been a sore point in my life possibly because of the way I was raised and also something that happened very early in my life when my folks were looking for a house to buy. The family was increasing and they needed a larger house, and I recall that we walked from place to place and looked at various houses; finally finding one; and on looking at it, everyone was satisfied. My mother was happy about it, my father thought it was a well built place, and I thought it was really nice. Incidentally, I still do. It's a cute little house, and it still stands and the people who have bought it, all have taken good care of it. As we were just about ready to leave, my father told my mother, "You know, I think this is going to be an all-Negro neighborhood." And she turned to him and said, "What did you say?" And he repeated, "I think this is going to be an all-Negro neighborhood." Her next question was, "What makes you think that?" He said, "I don't know, but I just think this is going to be an all-Negro neighborhood." There was a very quiet silence for a little while and then she said, "Let's go home. I'd rather live in a tent first."

There are many things about that attitude. One of them being, both of them had come from the South where people lived in all-Negro neighborhoods. Too, my father had been a railway mail clerk, and he had been to various cities where

Amerson: Negro people lived in all-Negro neighborhoods; we had on occasion come to Oakland, and my father had been to San Francisco. In each instance he had observed that the neighborhood where generally Negroes lived, they usually were deteriorating, and the city wasn't doing very much about keeping them attractive. He also had another thought about it; that being, in case of stress and strain, it may be more sensible to live in an integrated situation than in an all-Negro situation. It's easier to round up all people if they live all together. If they live out and away from each other, then if things became unreasonable and violent, they can get unreasonable and violent for the next door neighbor just as well as they do for the Negro family. Both of them were opposed to this thing of segregation, and I grew up in this kind of an atmosphere, and incidentally as long as I've been in California, I've never lived in a segregated area.

Henderson: Did your parents attribute the run down condition of all-Negro neighborhoods to some innate weakness in Negroes, or was it because of the city that wouldn't do its part?

Amerson: I don't really know their thoughts in that area; however, it could be a combination of both. The city might just not pick up the garbage as regularly as they do in other parts of the city, if at all; or sweep the streets as regularly, if at all, and this has happened here in Oakland in fact, not many blocks from here, and within the last nine years.

Some people bought property in a certain area near here, then known as English Village. One day these Negro people called to the office here; indicating that the street-sweeper didn't come by anymore, and the city no longer took care of the trees. I suggested to them to call the office of the city manager and be sure to talk to the city manager, and tell him what they had told me, and tell him that I suggested that they call. I did that because the city manager had formerly been city manager of Richmond, and I knew him quite well.

When a person looks out and finds that the city permits the street lights to go out, permits garbage to collect in the streets, and the streets to be unclean; then people, themselves, may take the attitude, "Well, what's the use? I'm fighting uphill." They too might decide, "Well, I'll let it go because if the city won't do their responsibilities,

- Amerson: no need of me doing mine," and that ends that. On the other hand, there may be some people who are not understanding enough to keep up their places and keep them presentable. There just may be delinquencies on both sides.
- Henderson: You mentioned that you too had some interracial mixture, and I wondered if your parents were, perhaps, light-skinned?
- Amerson: No, not really. My mother was a bit lighter of skin than I; my father, darker.
- Henderson: Light-skinned people also may have prejudices themselves.
- Amerson: Some may; however, I'm not sure about this area of prejudice. For many, many years I have heard that kind of attitude expressed and I just really haven't been able to find factual evidence. With the recognition of being a college department head, I traveled all over the states of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, Kansas and Missouri. I've been to 'social' events in Kansas City, and Topeka; I've partied in Little Rock; and one would have thought Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Muskogee, Houston, and Dallas were a 'social' activity circuit of mine. The persons who were the 'society' in any one or all of those areas were Negro people of all shades of brown, from very dark to exceedingly light. As I observed, the factor that made the difference was success; were they holding and doing a good job. I recall that they included very successful farmers, some light and some dark; in the numbers have been fair-skin savings and loan executives, and some were very dark. There have been school principals, teachers of note, and coaches, of every possible variation of brown; but, in each instance, the individuals had worked hard to prepare themselves and had been equally as diligent in striving to be a success.

As I have from time to time heard the premise on which you based your question, I have usually become more observant as to where I was, or more thoughtful as to where I had been. The idea seemed to be most unstable, and hie itself further and further east with each city I visited including Chicago. I am told that Washington, D.C., the mecca of Negro social life, is also the mecca of this type of inner-racial prejudice. It may be, I just do not know. Honestly though, it would take much convincing for me to accept the idea that even Washington, D.C., 'society' could put itself in the position of excluding a Marian Anderson, an Octavia Alexander; a Mary McLeod Bethune,

Amerson: a Nannie Burroughs; a "Duke" Ellington or an Ella Fitzgerald. Can you imagine not considering Roland Hayes, James Weldon Johnson, William Pickens or a Paul Robeson; Carl Rowan, George Schuyler, or a Howard Thurman and a Roy Wilkins on a 'society' list?

I have some ideas about this so-called 'light-skin' prejudice; but honestly, if I told them to you, you would brand me in the current vernacular as a "male chauvinist pig."

No, I'm sure my mother was not prejudiced. We were too poor to consider the luxuries of 'society,' and too there was not really any in Vallejo. Then again she and my father had dedicated themselves to the reason they came to Vallejo, and later to the purpose of giving their three children a good home, a good home life, and the best educational opportunities their money could afford. Perhaps here I should tell you about my parents. Are you interested?

Henderson: Yes.

Amerson: My mother and father belonged to the Negro Baptist Church, which I referred to earlier, and though the distance was some ten or twelve blocks; they did attend; they did take me as well as my brothers; and we did walk. No car was purchased until 1941. My mother was active in the missionary society and my father went to all the church meetings. He was a member of three lodges and my mother belonged to the Household of Ruth and the Eastern Star, auxiliaries of the Odd Fellows and Masonic lodges. Both belonged to and attended the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In those early days, there were no buses in Vallejo, and for a long time only three or four Negro families had automobiles. We were not one of those families. There was an interurban electric train which accommodated employees going to and returning from work on the Navy Yard; but it, as did everything else, cost money. My father walked.

Of course there was the minor matter of eating, and even then, food cost money--so--the Amersons had a garden; a garden of spinach, chard; turnips, carrots, beets; string-beans, garden peas and onions; and everything else seemingly. There were fruit trees; fig trees, an apple tree, plum trees, quince trees, apricot trees, peach trees; and we ate some, my mother canned some, made jelly from some; and, we ate well. Who did all that work? It started with my father doing the

Amerson: heavy work, and my mother; who just could have been a bit 'prejudiced' about eating wholesome food and at the same time saving money to pay for my re-occurring hospital and doctor bills as well as for a long range future of paying for the additional education of her children; did the weeding and watering. That was until Wayne learned the difference between carrots and weeds.

Long before 'Mr. Clean' arrived in the supermarkets my parents had a notion about everybody being clean. My father, who liked 'to know' the meaning of words; at sometime and somewhere must have read that the definition of 'clean' was, "being without benefit (or stigma) of dirt." I guess I should tell you the evolution of being clean. It started before hot water tanks, and hot water heaters. It started with the heating of water in buckets on a wood and coal stove and bathing in fairly large, round, laundry tubs. Civilization advanced for poor people including the Amersons and their neighbors; and plumbers developed from several short lengths of pipe and some quarter joints or elbows, a contraption called (I believe) a 'hot-water back' that fitted into the firebox of the cook stove and thus supplied hot, running water to a galvanized reserve tank. Providing one was not in too much of a hurry, one actually had ample hot water. Then came the coil (of pipe) hot water heater and the 'hot water back' was relegated to the junk pile, but usually only when it developed a leak. Happy day, finally arrived the hot water heater you and I know about today. The progress from the round wash tub, to a square one, and on and on 'til we now enjoy electric washers and dryers was as equally challenging and even more expensive; but through it all, our parents carefully articulated the idea that we should and would be clean and neat.

When remodeling of the first little house on the home place lot was needed, my father planned it. He did the work and I recall that for Christmas, Santa Claus brought me a fairly good set of tools. Good ole "Santa" taught me how to hold boards in place, and to hammer nails, and later Mr. and Mrs. Santa taught me how to paint. I even learned to hang wallpaper, shingle a house, build a fence, make a quilt, wash and iron clothes, darn sox, mend clothes, and cook. During World War I, when everyone was knitting, I knitted a sweater, a real good one.

As I look back on those war years, there were some few social activities among the Negroes, but my parents could not

Amerson: dance, did not drink, could not play cards, and did not go. Today I'm going to say something which I trust no one considers as being critical of other persons and the choices they made. Their choices and activities took care of what they considered were their needs. In the neighborhood in which my brothers and I lived, no other young person went to college or university, two finished apprenticeships on Mare Island, but the rest made careers from various jobs principally on Mare Island. The tragedy of the neighborhood is; most of them are deceased. From my class of I think fifty-one graduating from high school, but three of them graduated from college and only one other than Wayne went on to graduate school. Wayne was the only Negro in the class.

Of the Negro families in Vallejo with children of the ages of the three Amerson children, only two others of those children finished college. This is not a measure of success; for in their own way each of those children of the other families has had their own success; but our parents considered that the best education they could give their children was their commitment; and, this they did; and they found happiness in our progress and successes. We as a family had and enjoyed most everything our neighbors had and did, perhaps even a bit more. Two of us showed an interest in music; I was given violin lessons and my youngest brother, piano lessons. There were the usual toys, except ours were chosen with care; there were skates; baseballs, bats and gloves; bicycles and one of my brothers had the usual high school second-hand car. There were some vacation activities; and oh yes, we had a very good phonograph and many very fine records; one day, though, there came a radio. We lived and enjoyed life quite well in relation to our neighbors, and our friends.

Back to the area of housing, I later observed that in areas where Negroes became compacted, usually the values of the houses went down, and the costs of the houses went up. That too is tragic, and incidentally is and has been happening here in this area of Oakland. A few days ago, I heard on one of these radio talk shows of a lady who bought a house in Brookfield Village. She told the communicaster how much she paid for it, and she indicated she couldn't get any insurance on it now. She is in trouble. In the first place, the house in that area is not worth the price she paid, and in the second place, the area has become generally run down, and where certain types of crime prevail; hence the insurance companies will not cover the properties.

- Amerson: Incidentally, here at the headquarters, when the kinds of businesses began to change, robberies began to take place in this particular area. This headquarters and other places in the block can no longer get certain types of insurance either, including glass insurance. We now have to contract for what is known as a glass contract, and that costs a bit more. While we are discussing this type of problem, let me say that this headquarters has been broken in to. Apparently they didn't want anything but money and went through every drawer and cabinet in the place looking for it.
- Henderson: Has the location of this headquarters and your past experiences here affected the fact that you don't have very much material here right now? [Democratic party headquarters, Oakland.]
- Amerson: No. The reason that we don't have very much material here now is; first, this is a year in which most of the assembly people in this area consider that they are going to be re-elected without too much effort and much campaigning. The districts were not re-aligned, and most of the assembly people, because of the records they have maintained over the years, feel they can be re-elected without putting on a hard door-to-door campaign. Too, it is too early. Up to now I have not seen any literature or know of any headquarters of any of the assembly people yet.
- I saw Mr. John Miller just a few days ago in the Seventeenth District, and he indicated he's planning on opening his headquarters in Berkeley soon. That's not in this area, but nevertheless, he still hasn't opened. I'm sure Mrs. March Fong hasn't. I'm almost positive Mr. Robert Crown hasn't, and I dare say Mr. Ken Meade has not opened his headquarters as yet. They may in the very near future, but haven't as yet. The McGovern campaign is hard-pressed for money, and in the two headquarters they have in the Oakland-Berkeley area they're trying to keep them with staff and as much literature as they can. I do have some of their literature here and Hayward has a little. I'll repeat, the major problem in his campaign is money, or the lack of it.
- Henderson: So McGovern headquarters are not necessarily in every Democratic headquarters?
- Amerson: No, however, this is the Democratic headquarters for the county. Each campaign year, we usually have some of all of the material for all of the Democratic party candidates in

Amerson: the county. This headquarters serves as a sort of clearing house for all the headquarters opened within the county. Because we have maintained this office and kept it staffed for some nine years, people call here for all kinds of information, and though we do not know all the answers, we usually know where to direct them for information and/or services. Back to your questioning, I am sure that; again, all the candidates will leave some of their material here as usual.

Continuing in the trend of thought about housing, I don't think that people living in compacted areas; which may fall in what are referred to as tenements and ghettos get their money's worth out of what we call city services. They certainly do not get their money's worth out of the housing they buy, or their money's worth out of commercial services; and if you go all over Oakland, I can point out to you Safeway Store after Safeway Store that has been closed and is now occupied for something else, on the advent of Negroes in the community. They closed the Safeway Store next to Castlemont school as soon as the lease was over. They were out in almost a week; and, it's too bad. The surrounding community is composed of many small two and three bedroom homes. Some of the occupants have raised their families; and as they planned, are living in retirement. Today, they are too old to drive probably, and to go to a bustling, busy shopping center is just too much of a challenge. Now, when their income is at its lowest they must buy at a corner store, where prices must necessarily be higher because the little grocer does not get the advantage of volume buying. The newcomers in the area usually are relatively poor and cannot afford to pay the prices of the corner grocer and whether he realized it or not, he should not try to afford the price of traveling to a shopping center.

The causes of the closings of chain store outlets I am sure are related to economics, for I've noticed the financial pages of the newspapers repeatedly are reporting the increase earnings of the large grocery chains, but the poor family heads cannot show that kind of family financial growth. In part, I can understand the problems of such big business. I'm sorry to admit, but petty pilferage, and large scale stealing has much to do with their decisions. Across from here, Penney's has a large complex and it is rumored that as soon as their lease expires, they too are moving. The rumor continues that they lose approximately one thousand dollars a month from pilfering, in spite of the fact they have guards

Amerson: on duty. That will be a tremendous loss of convenience and economy to the many newcomers to East Oakland, principally Negroes. They need the advantages of Penney's volume buying power; they need the convenience and savings of a supermarket; they should not be saddled with heavy transportation costs. I can't help but wonder where they will go. Wherever it is, they have to pay extra in order to buy merchandise at discount prices. And it seems to me at some level, in some of our activities, churches or somewhere, somebody should be telling people that they are narrowing the limits of their own future.

There are times I wonder if there is a period of life that passed by me as I was taking my usual four or five hours of sleep when I was trying to cover the community front in the Bay Area. Do they no longer teach elementary economics in high school? I guess it is difficult when the young person, eighteen years of age, now legally an adult; is scheduled to or has just graduated from high school; and yet reads at the sixth grade level.

The Berkeley Housing Ordinance, 1963

Henderson: In 1963 when the Berkeley ordinance was voted down, what was your role in that incident?

Amerson: As I recall, it was decided that there would be set up a sort of a loose-jointed organization to fight for its passage. The overall organization was called the Berkeley Political Action Committee for Fair Housing. Because the areas in Berkeley at that time were fairly well segregated, the Negroes felt that it would be a good idea if we had a cooperating organization.

Ours was called the Committee for Fair Housing, and the uptown overall group was called Citizens for Fair Housing. The combined Citizens for Fair Housing had two chairmen: Professor Owen Chamberlain for north Berkeley and the hill area; and the Reverend Stovall, representing west and south Berkeley; an overall treasurer by the name of Mr. Ostrander; and two co-chairmen of the finance committee. I was one of the co-chairmen, with James Whitney as the other, and here is the letter that was sent out appealing to people for money, and here is a letter that I sent out appealing to the south Berkeley people for money. From my end of it, I first personally

committee for FAIR HOUSING

Campaign Headquarters:

2454 Sacramento Street
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Telephone 843 - 7420

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CO-OPERATING SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Berkeley Political Action Committee
Charles H. Houston Law Club
C.O.R.E.
C.S.O.
East Bay Democratic Club
H.O.M.E.
N.A.A.C.P., Berkeley Branch

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Liaison Assignments—Wesley Hester
and Samuel Cornelius
Material Distribution—C. Gilliam
Organizational Contacts—David Marshall
Publicity—Lloyd G. Dent



Dear Friend:

On January 22, 1963, five courageous members of the nine-member Berkeley city council voted in support of an ordinance which prohibits racial discrimination in the sale, rental or leasing of housing accommodations. The five councilmen are Arthur Harris and Bernice May (up for re-election); William T. "Zack" Brown, T. J. Kent, Jr., and Wilmont Sweeney.

They took this action **only** after the council had received the report of the council-appointed eighteen-member Citizens Committee to study racial discrimination in housing. The committee studied the problem for nine months, (holding hearings, reviewing reports, etc.) and found: (1) Racial and religious discrimination is wide spread in Berkeley; (2) It is morally indefensible; (3) The practice violates national, state and local public policy statements against such discrimination; and (4) That the practice is extremely harmful to the future growth and development of a progressive community.

The Citizens Committee recommended that the council pass an ordinance designed to discourage such discrimination. The Berkeley Welfare Commission unanimously adopted the findings and recommendations of the Citizens Committee and recommended further that council pass an ordinance making discrimination in housing a misdemeanor.

Following council passage of the Fair Housing ordinance, a group known as Berkeley Citizens United spearheaded a drive to collect 10,000 signatures on a referendum petition. This nullified the ordinance **until and unless** a majority of the voters indicate their approval of the council action on election day, April 2, 1963.

The committee for fair housing firmly believes that every person should have the right to acquire housing of his choice in accordance with his means, irrespective of his race or religion. The committee also commends the above-named councilmen who supported the ordinance.

We need at least \$4,000.00 for posters, postage, letters, flyers, and advertising in order to pass the word to every Berkeley voter to vote YES on fair housing. If fair housing cannot be supported in enlightened Berkeley, where will it be supported? Discrimination, like a pestilence, is no respecter of city boundaries. Therefore, we urgently solicit your financial aid regardless of your place of residence.

Make your check payable to "FAIR HOUSING" and mail to FAIR HOUSING COMMITTEE, 2454 Sacramento Street, Berkeley 2, California.

Sincerely,

A. Wayne Amerson
Chairman, Finance Committee

Amerson: canvassed Sacramento Street and its businesses that belonged principally to Negro people, and was able to collect enough money to pay the rent, the first printing bills, get the utilities turned on at the headquarters; and actually had a little extra.

We then met and began considering our approach to getting more funds, while others in the group began the planning on how to reach the community. We met in Attorney Wilmont Sweeney's office and Attorney Charles Wilson became the chairman for the Committee for Fair Housing. I assumed the responsibility for treasurer and office manager, and was there every morning at nine, leaving at night in the wee hours. We contacted many organizations; we think we just about covered all of them. We contacted all of the lodges, churches, clubs, professional groups, barber shops, beauty parlors, restaurants and on, and on. In a very short period of time, we amassed about \$6,000 from principally Negro contributors. Added to that was an amount that Byron Rumford pressured or handshaked people into giving, in excess of \$1,000. So all in all, we raised approximately \$7,500.

We distributed thousands and thousands of pieces of literature. Teams of people were always there folding and collating pieces as well as organizing material drops. It was considered necessary to contact every house with material in certain areas. Most of our material was of the nature of trying to tell them what was involved and how they should vote. I have some of it yet, I think. About a week before election time we put out a piece telling them how to mark their ballots, using a near exact copy of their ballot. We received from the East a statement regarding an appeal to the conscience of the American people regarding discrimination in housing, and we did it up in a nice form. This we distributed by using some twelve young ladies all dressed alike, and stationed outside of churches, both in the Negro and the white neighborhoods.

And then, while all this pressure was on from both our headquarters and the headquarters uptown; one night, someone burned a cross on Dr. Fred Stripp's front lawn. The next day we had this piece of literature run off for the Negro area, and it shook people up a little bit.

The NAACP, under the direction of Mrs. Tarea Pittman came down and gave support, money, and also presented us with this piece of NAACP material to put in with our distributions. The

- Amerson: Associated Real Estate Brokers, a Negro group came together and printed a piece for distribution in doorways. Another organization of Democratic precinct workers contributed and distributed a mimeographed two sheet information piece, almost like a letter to the public and that went to constituents, both in the white and the Negro areas.
- Henderson: I was very surprised to see the Real Property Brokers--
- Amerson: That's the Negro brokers; however, today Negro brokers belong to the California Real Estate Brokers Association.
- Henderson: I see.
- Amerson: Later, the Citizens for Fair Housing helped us distribute a piece, with our name included. With it, we really covered the town. Our headquarters put on the pressure--in our area. Looking back on that effort it is my firm belief that we might have made the ordinance pass if the uptown people had put on the same kind of pressure that we did from the start, and never let up. I just felt that their headquarters, although doing a job, never really pressurized their job to its ultimate and hence didn't realize the maximum vote that they could have netted. Because we lost by only two thousand or so votes, I think maybe we could have made it.
- But, another thing was happening also. The campus was beginning to get liberalized; and whereas the people who went around our district all appeared neat and clean because we so cautioned our workers; this was not the case with the uptown workers. I happened to have been living in Berkeley just up behind the campus, and I know the people coming out of the Citizens for Fair Housing office were not careful about how they appeared, because some of them came to the apartment house where I was living. Some of the older people who were living there were frightened by it. Those precinct workers looked like ragamuffins, and I think that was bad for a cause like Fair Housing.
- In that it did not pass I do not think it had the impact upon the fair housing bill in Sacramento that it should have or could have, but I do think it made a lot of legislative people in Sacramento stop, pause, and think about it.
- Henderson: The Citizens for Fair Housing were a mixed group?
- Amerson: It was principally white.

Henderson: I see. And you say your group was mixed, or principally black?

Amerson: It was principally Negro; however, many, many whites came down and worked.

The California Fair Housing Bill, 1963

Henderson: I think you told me once off-tape that you had a chance to talk with Luther Gibson about the state housing bill.

Amerson: Let's back up a minute. I lived in Vallejo when Mr. Gibson first came to Vallejo. I also lived in Vallejo when some of the now city fathers (some of them had been supervisors or council members, and one of them had been the mayor) were either school friends of mine, or played through the back fence or in the streets with me. All of them were what I would consider good friends. After the Fair Housing Ordinance in Berkeley, the regional office of NAACP had hired new staff, and this new staff had to be trained, and during this period of time I was asked by Mrs. Pittman if I would come to Berkeley to help on housing, and also help in the office, because they had no other personnel there except the secretaries; and I went.

While I was there, the Fair Housing Bill, A.B. 1240, came up and it passed the assembly and got stymied in the senate. It got before the committee which Mr. Gibson chaired, and in talking it over with the regional office, I knew that every progressive organization was putting on every kind of pressure possible, in order to see that that bill passed. Letters were solicited from all channels, as well as telegrams; people who knew anyone in politics were asked to give all of the service they could in seeing to it that those persons they might know would cooperate in trying to get that bill passed. Naturally, I being there and knowing people in Vallejo, I was asked and was willing to go to Vallejo and see what I could do.

I called on two persons whom I had been in school with, and asked them to do two things for me, and I put it to them in this manner. I did not really care what they thought about fair housing or their attitudes about it, and in each case, both of them said, "Well, you know, you and I were raised together." One of them indicated we used to crawl through the

Amerson: back fences so we could play in each other's yard. And I accepted that on face value because I chanced to know that Vallejo has been since World War II and is still, segregated. But nevertheless, I didn't say anything about that. I told them what I wanted. I let them know that this bill was before Mr. Gibson's committee, and that I did not think that I knew Mr. Gibson as well as I knew them, so I was asking them to intercede and convince Mr. Gibson to do two things: one, to make sure that Mr. Rumford had a fair hearing; and second, if he had the votes, to get that bill out of that committee. From one I got a clean-cut "Yes, I will," and from the other, "Well, let me talk to Luther" was the answer.

Incidentally, I don't think there was anyone else any closer to Mr. Gibson than those two. I did go to Sacramento, and I did sit in on the hearings, and Mr. Gibson every now and then would over and over ask Byron, "Mr. Rumford, do you think you're getting a fair hearing?" I don't know whether he was doing that for my benefit or not, but he knew me and he knew that I was in the audience.

However, Mr. Gibson had some problems. One of the problems was Mr. Burns from Fresno, and Mr. Burns was pressurizing from the other standpoint because he didn't want that bill to get out. When he thought that Mr. Gibson might be giving in, he applied more pressure, and this thing went on till the last day.

Henderson: What kind of pressure did Mr. Burns put on Gibson?

Amerson: Oh, I don't know because I was not there.

Henderson: Do you know of any pressure Mr. Gibson received from Washington?

Amerson: It is rumored, and I have heard it repeatedly, 'the national office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was able to get to congressmen and senators who were members of the Appropriations Committees on Military Spending.' I never heard that they had collared the majority of these committee members, but I think it was felt that they were close enough to it at least, to throw the blocks to an appropriation to Mare Island. That was pressure. It would ruin Vallejo.

Amerson: Over many years it's hard to tell what the relationships are of one senator to another senator, who, in total, may think pretty much alike. I can imagine that Mr. Gibson and Mr. Burns had some things in common.

There is another rumor that is out, and I think you should check this. It was getting late on the last day of the session, and that bill had not come out of Mr. Gibson's senate committee. In a dramatic move, Mr. Jesse Unruh, they tell me, picked up the gavel and said, "There will be no more bills out of this assembly until A.B. 1240 comes down." That added the drama to it, because people ran hither and yon, and reporters, I'm told, were running; some to the senate chambers, others to telephones. And he walked away from the podium; and everybody knew he meant there would be no more bills out of that assembly. Eventually and soon, A.B. 1240 came down and the assembly began its business again and incidentally A.B. 1240 was passed.

I have always thought well of Mr. Unruh as a politician, and I guess you read the Unruh Act which was passed before A.B. 1240.

Henderson: Yes.

Amerson: That was his bill; he engineered it through; and it has been an effective vehicle in the realization of Fair Housing.

VII THE CALIFORNIA DEMOCRATIC COUNCIL-CDC

Amerson: When I first became interested in the CDC, individuals including the former Governor Pat Brown, the now State Supreme Court Justice Stanley Mosk, State Senator Alan Cranston and former Congressman James Roosevelt, as well as others of prominence in the Democratic Party provided the organization with sound direction and virile leadership. As time passed, that leadership moved on and incidentally Negro involvement in party politics had become a significant consideration in several areas of California and more and more they challenged and urged the council to include Negro leadership in the policy making official circle. This approach met with adroit sidestepping and in instance little if any actual progress.

As a result of this, some several of the Democratic Party Negro leadership came together and organized what was known as the Minority Group Conference. It met in Fresno, as I recall, and set up an organization with its own officers. Club representation from predominantly Negro clubs, in areas where they had them, were present, and that included San Francisco and Oakland and, I think, Richmond, as well as other communities throughout the state. It went along for several years. I'm not sure whether it was three years or two years, but anyway it went along for a while, and we began developing some strength and some recognition both as a result of our being, and also by the fact that with the Brown administration came more recognition of the Negro's needs. The president of the organization became a judge, and soon the organization died out. Much of this activity passed me by, for remember--I was "hatched."

Some years later, the California Democratic Central Committee again began to manifest an unconcerned attitude toward the Negro, and there were some several considered slights that came up from the area of CDC. As a result of this situation, there was formulated an organization called Negro Political Action Association of California, which was

Amerson: referred to as NPAAC. They held their meeting in Bakersfield and again Byron Rumford took a very active part in that organization, working hard to bring to the attention of people why the Negro, as a whole, wanted representation.

This was in 1967. I believe Gus Hawkins was chairman and Byron was co-chairman, and there's a whole list of names of those involved. What information I have on it, is here. It progressed for a time and efforts were made to develop some cohesion among Negro leadership and Negro political strength. Finally though, it gave up the ghost and no longer exists. This year, CDC met in Oakland at the Hilton Inn. CDC to this day has not learned a thing from the first day it started. When I arrived in the afternoon and walked into the building, the first thing I observed was; in the long lobby there were tables for political aspirants, principally those who were already serving, plus those who were trying to get elected, including McGovern. I also noted the table for the opposition to I believe Mr. Dellums, if I'm not mistaken.

Henderson: To Ron Dellums?

Amerson: Yes, I think so. Down at the end of this lobby were tables for Ron Dellums, Shirley Chisholm, the East Bay Democratic Club (which is predominantly Negro) and a table that the Golden State Life Insurance Company paid for in order to have representation there and to indicate their concern for Negro aspirants.

I had begun to boil already, and began to walk around in a sort of uneasy manner when one of the members of the East Bay Democratic Club came to me and said, "Do you know what they're doing in there?" and I said, "In where?" and he said, "In the main auditorium where they're going to have a speaker." I said, "No, I haven't looked in there." "Come here," he replied.

So I went inside and I looked. The individual who was setting up the auditorium for the speakers, was setting it up in accordance to congressional districts. He started at one, two, three, four, five, six, and then he jumps to eight, nine, ten and kept going. Congressional district number seven was down behind number thirty-two, and at that point I lost all sense of balance. I went in and tried to get the man who was setting it up to change it, and he in all the dignity that he had, with that little clipboard under his arm, began swearing, and I decided that I should better walk away

Amerson: because I was feeling almost uncontrollable. As there was no need talking to him, I thought I'd better go and talk to someone who thought he was a five star general. I went to the next one up on the list of officers and talked with him, and he began arguing that he couldn't change it, and my patience soon ran out with him, and then I decided to go to the president. I was standing talking to him about it, and this second person I had talked to began getting into the conversation and said they didn't have time to make the change. I then told him very distinctly that when I started arguing about this it was over an hour before, and since that time they had had time, with all the men around there, to have changed it. In fact, I told him, they could have changed the positions of heaven and hell in that time. There was no excuse for them to bring about this slight on the Seventh Congressional District whose representative was a Negro, and who was going to be the speaker of the night.

Words kept on flying, and this general who had horned in got pretty angry with me, and he asked me as he was putting away his glasses, "Are you challenging me?" And I looked him in the eye and said, "No, I'm not challenging you, I'm telling you. You'd better put your glasses on before I give you the thrashing of your life." He did and the president told him to move on.

All I'm saying, is that in 1972 they still haven't learned the lesson which is necessary to be learned to have some kind of peaceful existence in this crazy world. And it annoys me, because there are too many of that kind of narrow-minded people running around with clipboards under their arms and empty heads on their shoulders.

Henderson: Who are the leadership people now?

Amerson: The leadership people now? The Negro leadership? We really have no leadership. I mean, no state-wide leadership. They do not have an organization anymore. The president of the CDC is a Negro or was--he may have resigned because he's trying to do something else I'm told; but I don't really know.

Henderson: What is his name?

Amerson: I've been sitting here trying to remember and can't.

Henderson: It can easily be looked up.

VIII INVOLVEMENT IN THE FUNERAL SOCIETY MOVEMENT

Henderson: One day during these recording sessions I seem to recall you mentioning having to attend a funeral society meeting. Is that an interest in your life, we have not covered? Is there a story there?

Amerson: Yes, it is an interest and has been one in which I have spent many hours. Somehow, I'm not too sure as to where to start. I'll try to start with a related involvement with a group which was working on the development of a Co-op store in San Francisco. My brother told me of the interests a group of young people and instructors at San Francisco State College had in the project and he and I took out memberships. Later, the project faltered and I then joined the Berkeley Co-op. It was in the middle fifties, a sign on the Co-op bulletin board told of the formation of a local Funeral Society. I was a friend of one of those named on the notice, so I asked him about it, and later joined. I went to one of the annual meetings, noted several friends were members, began reading whatever information I could get on the function of the Society movement, and soon decided it was an organization formed to do something about an area which for many years had caused some worry in my mind--how could poor people avoid the responsibility of paying the prevailing high costs of funerals?

In 1960 I think, this same friend asked me if I would be willing to go on the board of directors for an unexpired term of one year and in 1961 I was elected to a full three-year term and have been on the board of the Bay Area Funeral Society ever since.

Henderson: Just what is the function of the Funeral Society?

Amerson: In spite of the fact that death is a normal function of life; very few people have considered the steps necessary to the caring for the remains, or what about the relatives and friends

Amerson: remaining. The money spent in this area generally represents the third largest expenditure in the life of a person, yet is the one area in which there are no guidelines as to costs, governmental requirements, and value comparisons, available. Through a local society which one joins, it is hoped that one can and will make such pre-need considerations as will provide for the disposition of the remains, in a dignified, knowledgeable manner; and within a reasonable cost range.

For years I have been aware of the fact that many people are directed into costly funeral arrangements; and others arrive at that point either because of guilt feelings, status symbols, or custom. The result is the same and for poor people this kind of expenditure may actually take money away from family needs and/or educational futures of children. That there are several ways in which the needed funeral arrangements can be contracted for; for so much less expense, yet with the same elements of dignity and meditation; is the program of the funeral society. It is a matter of needed cooperation of the undertaker and a thoughtful and knowledgeable approach by the person or persons making the arrangements. In order to accomplish such ends the funeral society makes arrangements with one or some several undertakers to guarantee a simple or "basic" disposition at a minimum of cost and the funeral society develops a means or method of educating the public in to thoughtful consideration of such a service.

Too, there is another area in which the funeral societies are interested. In the laws of each state, there are certain regulatory measures which still obtain, yet are outmoded by time. Some societies are actively trying to influence legislators that these laws need no longer exist.

By constant planning, much hard work, and a continuing educational programming, the Bay Area Funeral Society has become the second largest society in the United States. I consider this highly commendable, but also realize that even with this record; the Bay Area Funeral Society has not done enough to project its program into the areas inhabited by minority and poor people. We have done some things along these lines, but just not enough.

Back to my involvement: I have been on the Bay Area Board since 1960, have been its chairman for some four or possibly five years; I have been recently elected by the California Federation of Funeral and Memorial Societies as

Amerson: a member of their board of directors; and since 1969 have been an elected member of the board of directors of the Continental Association of Funeral and Memorial Societies, the latter of which includes some twenty-one societies in Canada and approximately one hundred ten such societies in the United States and Hawaii.

These honors are fine and I appreciate the trust the members have in me to so elect me to these offices; however, after 1974 I just may follow-up on an area more closely related to education in the field for I consider so much more of that is demanded in order to alert the poor and needy that they have choices which they can and may make.

IX ATTITUDES ON NEGROES AND RACE

Amerson: I have never thought anyone was ever fearful of competition. Negro people have been able to develop at any level. Competition has almost become the life-giving blood of this country. Many have used it as an incentive to excel; others, have used it as a vehicle to acquire. Those who have used it as motivation to become the best, generally spend little or no time or effort in impeding the progress of someone else--they are usually too busy in preparing themselves to be the first or the best. Think very carefully of successful Negro persons, even those in this area. Among all the restaurants in the Richmond downtown area, there is a very nice restaurant, owned and operated by a Negro. I daresay his Negro customers would not maintain his business for a full week out of any given year. His place of business is strictly modern, it is immaculately clean, and the food is very good and served promptly and carefully. He is competing with the idea of excelling. Whites support his place, whites have bragged about it to me; and though I'm sure other restaurant owners in Richmond know he is there, they know they will just have to get better in order to take away his business. They do not fear him anymore than they fear each other.

Do you imagine anyone is fearful of the competition of Dr. Jackson, an outstanding Negro medical doctor of Alameda County, or of any other Negro medical doctor here? I haven't heard anyone voice fear of a Wilt Chamberlain, or a Nate Thurmond. I sort of get the idea that some of the fans wish there were more Reggie Jacksons and Hank Aarons. I am sure Attorneys Clinton White, Thomas Berkley, Wiley Manuel or a Wilmont Sweeney will admit to encouragement and suggestions from their many white competitors. I am also sure they received slights and discrimination from some in their profession who knew, that for one reason or another, they honestly were not competitors.

Generally, in the industrial types of jobs and in many governmental positions the area of concern for the Negro worker is not competition. It can be jealousy, it can be

Amerson: prejudice, it can be a fear of survival. Sorry, but my 'male chauvinism' is going to show again. Usually the problems arise because of, or are instigated by women; unless there has been some tinkering with the basic hiring requirements. In some cases it is the compelling concern of the welfare of his or her Negro fellowman or woman.

I'll talk awhile about the latter. A Negro college graduate arrives on a career governmental job along with a, or some several equally prepared white employees. If the Negro employee is concerned about the plight and progress of his Negro fellowman, he belongs to the NAACP; perhaps is active in the YMCA, or the Urban League, or both; too, he is a member of a church--or must go with his wife. His white counterpart does not belong or feel a compulsion to go to any one of the above, oftentimes not even the church--there is no need to; so he can and does read and sometimes effectively study the intricacies of his job. The Negro has arrived; with a steady government job, and soon there are bridge clubs, sorority and fraternity as well as other social affairs. The church has meetings that must be attended, the Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, or some such club has a monthly meeting; and finally home becomes merely a place to sleep. If you have made the error of having a listed telephone number, you just can be awakened in the middle of the night by someone who thinks you can solve their problem. Then when exams for promotions come up the Negro cannot cram enough, to pass high enough, to get called off the list. He may realize what has happened, but I assure you his wife will not. If there are children, the children know more about the babysitter than they do about their parents. If the "quota" system automatically promotes the Negro, in spite of his score; his fellow white workers set aside his friendly relationship and the white worker's wife becomes violent. Under the above conditions, competition really no longer exists, and whatever it is that has taken its place becomes vicious.

So long as competition recognizes some established and basic rules, the white person does not fear the Negro and the Negro should not fear the white person. The fact is; under the recognized rules of competition, I have found the white fellow worker oftentimes is willing to be of help.

I presume I should defend myself regarding women as workers. I frankly am not opposed to women working, or being

Amerson: supervisors, or managers. Generally, however, in any one of the three levels, women workers are fully aware that the American male will very seldom engage in an 'out and out' battle with them. I have worked as an employee supervised by women, and as a supervisor with women as managers, many of both; and I can count but four who were in enough control of themselves to be objective, fair and honest in their decisions. The rest played games; not because they should feel inferior (they had higher ratings); not because they should feel insecure (they had years of tenure); not because they were poor (they were making good salaries, the same salaries that men in the same positions made)--so, why? A funny thing used to happen, almost daily. A certain woman with a rather high position in one of the agencies in which I worked realized that some of her activities and utterances probably indicated she was prejudiced in so far as Negroes were concerned. Every day she went out of her way to show favor and take a Negro woman worker home. This was very nice and exceedingly thoughtful, except each evening she benevolently steered this Negro person into the back seat. I can hear her now convincing a group (any group) of how she had made her adjustment with the racial problem, "Why you know, I have several Negro workers on my staff and we get along quite well. There's never any friction; in fact, I go out of my way to take one home each evening. The poor thing has no car, or can't drive, or something."

No man supervisor would have done that regardless of how prejudiced he may have been, and no Negro man would have accepted that kind of treatment from a male supervisor or manager, after the first encounter. Further, I might add, that if it had been in the power of this woman in a rather high position to have promoted or demoted the employees working under her direction, the Negro woman would have been promoted over me; me with my crazy ideas about equality, coupled with a heavy sprinkling of re-occurring arrogance. I could continue in this vein, but I'll skip over countless other problem areas of women in competition for that is not the question area.

The medical and scientific world was shocked at the untimely and unnecessary death of Dr. Charles Drew because he could not receive the benefits of his own discovery (blood plasma) in a southern hospital where it was available, because he was a Negro. The scientists and medical men of note were not afraid of Dr. Drew; he in good clean competition,

Amerson: arrived at the answers first. It was ignorance, and intolerant prejudice that permitted him to die. My only hope is that more, many more Negro youth quickly determine they are going to be the best in whatever they find themselves doing.

Henderson: Have you some remarks to tie together what has been considered before?

Amerson: Earlier you referred to a remark I made regarding mixed blood and asked if my mother chanced to be of light-skin. I think we dealt with the area of a potential prejudice but I do have some added attitudes about Negroes and race.

I am primarily a human being, product of the human race. My basic needs are as those of every other human being: food, clothing and shelter. Because we are compelled to contact so many other human beings in order to have these basics, it is necessary to acquire some position in society.

Today, and in this segment of the world, we have learned to do many things and our rewards of food, shelter and clothing abound on our ability to make a sale, and to compete. Generally, when two people meet, a sale is made; one sells the other; and at times they part, having sold each other. The more sales one makes, the better competitor that person is. It is very difficult to make a sale if what you are trying to sell is (1) of poor appearance, (2) is not useable, (3) involves the spending of too much money, (4) has many of the characteristics of potentially not being worthwhile.

The Negro is here, here, in America. All of those here, generally, are citizens and here from birth. Our fore-parents came as slaves, for the most part. During that time; and as slaves, Negro people were bought and sold as cattle, and oftentimes used as entertainment as well as compelled to do the menial hard work. Some ran away, and were sheltered by well-meaning whites; and others, taken in by Indians. Life at no time stands still so some Negro people have the high cheek-bones and color, and hair texture of Indians; others have the light color, texture of hair and features of the so-called white person. In either case, I daresay that the Negro was not the controlling force; nevertheless we are here in America, second and third generations from slavery; and of every kind of variation of human color, with a conglomerate of features, and variables of hair texture that go from extremely curly to extremely straight.

Amerson:

Now I want you to look at my shoes, they are black. You, nor I, have not seen a half dozen 'black' people in all our lives; separately and I daresay, not collectively. Many years ago there was an article in one of the monthly magazines, which told of how many thousands of light or fair-skin Negroes are crossing the color line each year. Today, many, many people do not know who or rather 'what' they are. The only thing we really know is there is almost a non-percentage of black people in America.

I have noticed that young Negroes in groups I have lectured to; begin to get edgy about my non-use of the word 'black' in referring to Negro people or the race. I recall one rather light-brown complexioned young lady with a 'natural', who became quite upset one evening as I was talking. I might add, I have no feelings against 'natural' hair arrangements--providing the wearer has the money to keep it well attended, or has more money to purchase one which enhances their appearance. These things that have many of the attributes of a mop, look bad on the wearer, and look worse to me.

Back to the young lady, hers was real, but it needed care. I knew her problem; it was that word "Negro." However, every time she mustered up enough courage to say something, she must have looked at her hands and knew she had lost the argument before a room full of people, with only three or four other Negroes present. I didn't convert her, for I'm sure she bordered on militancy. Oh well, one can't win them all.

When I suggested that it was possible I could get mad as an Irishman and bust someone over the head with a 'shillelagh'; or scalp someone as an Indian; or even may dump them in a caldron of hot oil as an African; and then go before the judge and plead "not guilty," because of my background: "Should I not go free?" Well, that sort of broke up the party.

Back to the idea of a "sale." Every individual has himself to sell. When one is young (very young), crying and yelling sometimes (oftimes) reaps results; but as one gets older it is not so effective. The only time the 'squeaky' wheel, gets the grease then, is when the wheel is big and the squeak is loud and shrill. Oftimes the person in the driver's seat gets down, looks at the wheel, decides there is

Amerson: a slight burr on the wheel that will wear off, shoots a little oil on the axle, and climbs back and let's the wheel continue to carry the load. ("What, no grease?")

"Black' as a word has been associated with many undesirable things as dirt, night, funerals and death, and on and on; so starts off as a negative approach to a group of people that have beautifully colored skins, which are not black. Do you realize how many, many years we struggled, and fought to bring the white race around to capitalizing the word "Negro." So soon as the young Negro began to consider himself a 'Black', he immediately became a 'black'; no capital. When the Negro youth permitted the radicals, the hippies and the ne'er-do-wells to influence his dress; he became the unwanted. When he began to be involved in myriads of petty crimes and challenging with violence, his presence became too costly. When his performance in school sank to an improbably low, he arrived at the bottom of the ladder in people's minds and was determined as being worthless. "No sale."

This is not all the Negro's fault. All levels of government aided in his present status. A new day of what the white liberal calls 'inalienable rights' gave my young people the freedoms they did not know what to do with, and their parents lacked the education and understanding to cope with. Thanks Mrs. Henderson. You are young. You are working hard to take your rightful place in 'society.' Keep on. I have greatly enjoyed these sessions.

Henderson: On behalf of The Bancroft Library, thank you for this interview.

Transcriber: Gloria Dolan
Final Typist: Keiko Sugimoto

International Association of Public Employees
November, 1950

California Chapter Executive Meet Pulls Spokesmen From 17 Locals



CALIFORNIA'S recent executive committee meeting held in San Francisco brought out a full complement of state and local chapter officers and representatives. The chapter is made up of 17 area chapters. Attending were:

Nov. 1950
Standing l to r: Whit Henry, San Francisco, entertainment co-chairman; John Morgan, Hollywood, San Hoval Chapter; Joe Peters, Los Angeles, California Chapter; Betty Carroll, Los Angeles, chapter past-president; Tom Grant, San Francisco, constitution chairman; Ben Cornet, San Francisco Chapter representative; George Croda, Oakland, president of the East Bay Chapter; Mary Ann Williams, Oakland, and Wayne Amerson, Richmond, East Bay Chapter reps.; William Bryant, Vallejo, North Bay Chapter; Ellen Hallinan, San Francisco, California Chapter treasurer; Roy Foster, Hollywood, Harbor Chapter rep.; Elta Cain, San Francisco Chapter president; Bob Stevens, Sacramento, Capitol Chapter and Hillis Hooper, San Francisco Chapter representative.

Seated l to r: Roy Portman, Napa, resolutions chairman; Mildred Argall, Sacramento, Capitol Chapter; Lillian Hall, San Francisco Chapter; Marc W. Johnson, San Francisco, Calif. Chapter 1st vice-president; Marg Ward, Los Angeles representative; Arthur E. Wood, Los Angeles, president, California Chapter; James G. Bryant, Sacramento, Capitol Chapter and International past-president; Kay Upton, Los Angeles, California Chapter secretary; Cecil Welsh, Vallejo, president, North Bay Chapter, Betty Milner, San Francisco, California Chapter past-president; Ina Welch, San Rafael, North Bay Chapter, and Florence Couper, Santa Rosa, North Bay Chapter rep.

REV. JOHN DILLINGHAM
64 NORTH MUNN AVENUE
APT. 24
NEWARK, N. J. 07106

9/29/73

Dear Wayne:

As always I appreciated and enjoyed hearing from you. Knowing you from the past, I am sure you have but few hours (moments) which you can really call your own, unless it's when you are asleep.

I'm not going to try to write a usual letter; instead I'll try to supply the dates you requested and some of the names. It's been a long, long time ago but I sort of have the urge to write a short accounting of those days of my sojourn in Oakland and the Bay Area. I've never tried this sort of thing before, but you can pick from it the information you requested and I just may use my copy of this with the denomination.

We think of you often, and incidentally if you are again out this way, I trust you can again visit me.

When I, on assignment by the Presbyterian Missions Board, arrived in Oakland, May 15, 1945, I soon became aware of the magnitude of the problem gripping the entire San Francisco Bay area and particularly West Oakland where it had been suggested that I focus my efforts. Daily excursions into areas of War Housing and nightly attendance in numerous community meetings impressed me with the fact that educated, able Negro leadership, willing to give of themselves and their time, was exceedingly scarce, and no match for the demands arising from the in-migrants, former war-workers, who had arrived from the then referred to "south-west" and "deep south" of the United States.

My trips of "evaluating" were many, starting early in the mornings and ending late into the night. I met many Negroes who boasted that they were "Native sons and daughters" and, indeed, frankly resented the presence of the "in-migrant" Negroes who were no longer needed in War work, principally in the shipyard industry. With the closing down of the War effort, the competition for employment in non-defense industry was keen and nigh on to being vicious. The Equal Employment Proclamation issued by President Roosevelt was fast losing its effectiveness and the job market, or the lack of it, became a jungle, with what appeared to be all elements of the area pitted against the war-industry in-migrant.

I took notes of every meeting, listing names of persons who attended with the intent to solve some of the problems; in free time my wife, who had sorted out information from my notes and lists, and I would discuss the potentials of the area as predicted by Dr. Charles S. Johnson, and it was in this setting and atmosphere that I was destined to become the founder and organizer of the West Oakland Center. From my rather copious notes, I determined the Center needed the aid of a young Negro social

REV. JOHN DILLINGHAM
64 NORTH MUNN AVENUE
APT. 24
NEWARK, N. J. 07106

Page 2

worker, Wayne Amerson, whose proficiency was widely hailed. He, his name, and his efforts were on the rolls of seemingly every organization that appeared to have a valid program of trying to solve the Bay Area problems; and though I expected him to tell me he "had no more time or energy", I nevertheless knocked on his door, introduced myself, explained I had a problem and asked to talk with him. He invited me in and I poured forth my problems, sketched the background and format of my assignment, and asked if he would assist me.

Much beyond my expectations, he said, "Yes; the area needs such a Center. There are doubtlessly some Negro people here who have been members of Negro Presbyterian churches who would feel more comfortable if such a church was established here." Since Dr. Stanley A. Hunter, a Presbyterian minister of Berkeley was involved, Wayne knew the cause was worthy and agreed to help. He also asked the possibilities of including the interracial aspect of the venture. Having noted his past insistence on this element of approach, I was not surprised, and I had previously determined that I would have to meet this challenge. I had listened to him repeatedly telling groups: "This world with all its new inventions and technology has become too small for people in a town or a city to be segregating themselves. We all must learn to live and work with each other in harmony and understanding, or else there is going to be trouble, more trouble than any of us, individually or collectively, can solve."

As I look back on those days, before I called on Wayne, I felt I was facing what then seemed to be the impossible. It was through him that I was introduced to Byron Rumford and later to Mrs. Rumford, who was agreeable to becoming a member of the first Board of Directors of the Center. Early in the development of the Center, board meetings were held in the homes of both the Rumfords and Wayne Amerson.

Over the years I've many times reflected on that period of my life. I consider I was most fortunate in "finding" a young man whose dedication to the religious thought of an enlightened community left him little time for the traditional church concepts. I have since learned that in his earlier years he had worked tirelessly with the American Baptist denomination trying to bring about a broader commitment from the Northern California Baptist program staff; but he determined there was no way at that time to elicit such an understanding approach. At this point he became an ardent supporter of the Church for the Fellowship of All People, established in San Francisco.

Amerson was an officer in the Berkeley Interracial Committee; a volunteer in the development of the San Francisco Council for Civic Unity; a tireless worker with Dr. Harold N. Geistweit, pastor of the Lakeshore

REV. JOHN DILLINGHAM
64 NORTH MUNN AVENUE
APT. 24
NEWARK, N. J. 07106

-Page 3

Baptist Church, Oakland, to create such a Council in Oakland; a member of the original Board of Directors of Fellowship Church; assistant to Mrs. Laura B. Clark and Dr. Suell Gallagher with others in the starting of the South Berkeley Congregational Church -- an integrated church movement; ever ready participant at meetings related to his daily employment; and yet had said "Yes" to my request, serving as a Director of both the Church and Center. Occasionally I would notice his walking into the Church services but the times I appreciated most were those when he would stop by and informally visit. Those were the hours I looked forward to, for there were suggestions as to specific ways in which the Center might be a more viable assist to the community. He would often go over, with the founder, the positive and negative factors of operating programs. During just such a visit he recommended that the Center Board consider involvement with certain basic community resources. From this proposal the Oakland Health Department was invited to use the Center for a Jell Baby Clinic, serving all racial groups in the area on a scheduled two days a week operation.

Soon, we invited and were pleased to have the Keeton Memorial Chorus use the Center as its official headquarters. During another visit Wayne suggested the formation of a choir made up of several language groups, and though it sounded nigh on to impossible we tried it and with his contacts it became a success. Another day he suggested that at least once a month the Church should invite a prominent speaker and this monthly service was launched October 5, 1947, with the Mayor of Berkeley as speaker.

In retrospect, a community was aided and challenged, a Mission Church and community Center developed, and a ministerial leadership grew and was enriched by friendships and unending aid that I received from A. Wayne Amerson, W. Byron Rumford, Dr. Stanley A. Hunter, and their Hosts of friends. For these things I shall forever be most grateful.

Say, fella', this was not as hard as I thought it would be. You always have been critical of the denomination moving me elsewhere; but they like I, perhaps, have the idea that one should quit (or move) when you're ahead. In my business one oftentimes finds they are more effective when one can move before his mistakes catch up with him. On that note, thanks for this opportunity and I hope it provides you some of what you wanted.

Very truly,

John Dillingham, whose memory we mourn, was an example to all those who crossed his path. He lived up to what he preached. He was a brother to all human beings, regardless of their race, color, religion, or nationality background. Indeed, he was not only his brother's keeper, but his brother's brother....He was a learner and teacher, always reading, always anxious to learn from others, and, even more anxious to help those who wanted to learn, young and old....He was cut from the same cloth as the Good Samaritan and never "passed by" on the other side of the street, in order to avoid the suffering, the afflicted and the needy....He understood that where two or three are gathered for God's purposes, there is God, also, and, therefore, he joined and supported several organizations working for the good of all the people.He utilized all the instruments by which he thought man could improve his civic lot: the newspapers, the electronic media, the platform and the ballot.... Most important of all, he was a Christian seven days of the week, practising his faith, making his faith real in small as well as large matters....He was a down-to-earth Christian who, both by word and deed, made a difference in people's lives and made them to feel, "There goes a real Christian."

John Dillingham was also a reminder that it's not where men and women are born, but where they and their parents set their sights that make the difference....He was born to John and Alice (Purdy) Dillingham on November 10, 1896, in Leota, in the state of Mississippi--by imagination a scrubby, rural Mississippi townlet, "across the tracks", but of which our John might easily be the most outstanding person to have been born there!....Somehow, he got to Shaw University, that little Baptist institution so famed for the men and women it has sent forth. There he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree, but he did not stop there. He continued to Yale University for his Master of Arts degree, and then to Crozier Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, for his

Bachelor of Divinity degree, altogether making him one of the best prepared 99
 clergymen of his time....From the beginning, he turned to religion, first, as
 national student secretary of the YMCA, 1926-28, then as an instructor and di-
 rector of religious education at Alabama State College and Tennessee State Tea-
 chers College, 1931-35; next, as staff secretary, of the Emergency Peace Cam-
 paign, 1936-37; then, more directly into the ministry and serving churches in
 Chester and Philadelphia, and making a name for himself, especially in Phila-
 delphia, where Faith Presbyterian Church 1938-45, became a beacon light to young
 and old, both as a church and as a helping hand in all good works citywide....
 He was next call^d to the San Francisco Bay area, to build a religious community-
 service program for all the diverse people who had flocked there. He not only
 built a many-pronged community-centered project but he founded another Faith
 Presbyterian Church in Oakland and there he stood out as a representative of the
 Christ who had healed the sick, fed the hungry, drove the money-changers out of
 the temple, and said, "Suffer little children to come unto me." As in prepara-
 tion for his West Coast days, his YMCA secretaryship had taken him to interna-
 tional conferences in Finland and Denmark where he had met and lived with people
 from all parts of the world.

John Dillingham was unswervingly committed to all his responsibilities, but
 to none more than to his wife and home--second only to his faith and church....
 First to the former Geraldine Satchell, whom he nursed during the last 21 years
 of her life--21 years of illness, and, next, to the surviving former Gladys Free-
 man who, in turn, served and nursed him, as devotedly and uncomplainingly as
 John would have done, if the circumstances had been reversed. Other survivors
 are a sister-in-law, Mrs. Ruth Hinton, of Atlantic City, and several nieces
 and nephews.

If one ~~sent~~ could describe John Dillingham it would be: "He walked in his
 integrity, and with love." May he rest in peace.

Newark, N.J.

Prepared by G. James Fleming
 February 28, 1974

INDEX -- A. Wayne Amerson

Alameda County Welfare Department, 19-21
 American Friends Service Committee, 58
 American Baptist Convention, USA, 5, 13
 Amerson, Henry S., 1, 3, 71-72
 Amerson, Matilda C. Brown, 13, 3, 71-72
 Anderson, Ivy, 4

Baily, Dr. John W., 12
 Baptist church, Negro, 5-13
 Bay Area Funeral Society, 85-86
 Berkeley Housing Ordinance, 1963, 76
 Berkeley Interracial Council, 62-63
 Berkeley Political Action Committee, 76
 Berkley, Thomas, 62
 black, as a term for Negroes, 20-21, 92-93
 black churches (see Negro churches)
 boilermakers union, 35-37
 Brown, Edmund G., 82
 Burns, Hugh, 80-81

California Democratic Council, 82-84
 California Fair Housing Bill, 1963, 79
 California State Employment Service, 24-52, 53-61
 California State Personnel Office, 1941, 24-25
 California State Relief Administration, 17-24, 32
 California War Manpower Commission, 27-42
 Caviel, A.B., 7
 church associations, 6-13
 churches (see Baptist, Methodist, Congregational, Negro, Presbyterian, church associations)
 civil rights (see racial attitudes, racial integration, racial segregation, employment, housing)
 Claiborne, Elmer, 5
 Clark, Mrs. Laura B., 10-11, 21
 Codornices Village, 29
 Cofer, Bernice, 12-13
 Congregational church, 10-11, 13
 Civilian Conservation Corp, segregated camps, 20

Democratic Party

Alameda County headquarters, 74-75
 California Democratic Council, 82-83
 Negro clubs, 83-83
 Dillingham, Rev. John, 11-13, 95-99

employment, 43-45, 89-90

general education examination, 39
 Negroes, 41
 women, 89-90
 World War II placement, 27-42

Fair Employment Practices Commission, 34, 64-66
 Fair Housing Bill, California, 1963, 79
 Faith Presbyterian Church of Oakland, 12-13
 Farragut Elementary School, Vallejo, 2, 5
 Fellowship Church of San Francisco, 11, 13, 59-61
 Fiske, Dr. Alfred, 11
 Fleming, Dr. Sanford, 12
 foundry workers, minority, 39-40
 funeral societies, 85-87

Gallagher, Dr. Buell, 11, 13
 Geistweit, Dr. Harold, 13
General Baptist, 8
 General Baptist Association, 5-6, 8-9
 General Metals Corporation, 39, 41
 Gibson, Luther, 79-81
 Gillett, Rev. Stanley, 12
 Glover, Don, 38, 41

handicapped persons, organization of, 22-23
 Hawkins, Augustus, 34, 37, 66-67, 83
 Hayes, Mrs. Lemphi, 19
 Hill, Rev. Daniel, 21
 housing, 68-69, 73, 75-81
 during World War II, 29-30
 Hunter, Dr. Stanley, 12

Ingles, Rev. 13
 International Association of Public Employees, 94
 International Council of Religious Education, 9

Johnson, Charles, author of The Negro War Worker in San Francisco, 30-31, 39
 Johnson, Manley, 11
 Johnson, Mildred, 12
 juvenile delinquency, 60-61

Kagel, Sam, 27, 38
 Keating, 22
 Keeton Chorus, 12
 Kristich, Peter, 23
 Kyles Temple, A.M.E. Zion Church, Vallejo, 7-8

labor unions, 35-37, 40-42
 Laney Trade School, Oakland, 39
 Langston University, Oklahoma, 6-7, 9, 17
 legislation, 64-66, 76-81

McCormack, Thomas, 22
 Mare Island Navy Yard, 1, 3-5, 14
 Methodist church, 7-8, 13
 Milens Jewelry, 41
 Mills College, 66, 68
 Muse, Rev. J.T., 8

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 38, 58, 80
 Negro, as a term for black people, 20-21, 92-93
 Negro National Baptist Convention, 7
 Negro Political Action Association of California, 82
 Negroes

churches, 5, 9, 13-14
 employment, 3-4, 27, 32, 35-36, 40-45
 fraternal organizations, 5
 housing, 68-69, 73, 75-81
 illiteracy, 55-57
 politics, 82-84
 real estate brokers, 78
 school, Vallejo, 14-16
 Nichols, Rev. Roy, 13
 Northern California Baptist Convention, 6-7

Oakland, neighborhoods, 73-76

Phillips, Dr. George W., 13
 Pittman, Tarea, 38, 77-79
 politics, 62-64, 74, 77, 82-84
 Presbyterian church, 9, 11-13
 Presbyterian State and National Boards, 10

racial attitudes, 4, 7, 46-48, 54, 70-71, 88-93
 racial integration, 9, 15, 21, 61
 racial segregation, 3, 5, 14-15, 19-20, 68-69, 76
 Rochester (Jack Benny's fellow actor), 5
 Rumford, Byron W., 34, 61-67, 77, 83

Smith, Leroy, 5
 social worker registration, 33
 South Berkeley Congregational Church, 11, 13, 21
 Stout, Glenn, 19-20

Teamsters, 41-42
 Thurman, Dr. Howard, 11, 58-60
 Toney, Charles, E., 14-16
 Turner, Rev. William, 6

Unruh Jesse, 81
 Urban League, 38, 41, 58

Vallejo, 1-2, 4, 6-8, 71-73, 79-80
 educational project, 1933, 18
 Negro community, 1, 5, 14
 Negro school, 14-16
 Office of U.S. Employment Service, 22

War Manpower Commission, California, 27-42
 Warren, Earl, 66
 Watkins, Ben, 35
 Williams, L.J., 6
 women, employment, 89-90
 Work Progress Administration, 19

Ziesenhenne, Henry, vi-xii

